

Kaitangata Twitch

Kaitangata Twitch was produced by Shed TV based in New Zealand. The Island of Kaitangata is twitching again as it did 50 years ago when a young girl, Shelly, disappeared on her 13th birthday, apparently swallowed up by the Island. While the Bay in which young Meredith and her mixed-race family live becomes a developers playground, Meredith's father and her sister Kate try to battle for the preservation of the Bay, putting immense pressure on the family unit. During all this chaos Meredith has her own battle to fight by being drawn to the Island in disturbing dreams. Having always felt different from the rest, she has to learn to understand her Maori heritage, find her true self and unravel the mystery of Kaitangata before the Island claims another victim. Her old mentor Lee Kaa can help her but in the end she must stand alone.

As the tension in Meredith's family rises and the threat to the Island grows, Meredith follows Shelly's ghost to Kaitangata Island where she is confronted by the terrifying Cannibal chief standing in the gaping mouth of the cave. While still dreaming and running for her life towards the edge of a cliff, Lee Kaa saves Meredith in real life from falling to her death. Meanwhile, Meredith's sister Kate makes a dramatic statement to show the strength of her beliefs in preserving the bay as a nature reservoir despite other people's opinions. Slowly Meredith starts to understand the mystery surrounding Shelly, her connection to Lee Kaa and his role of being the Ahi Kaa, the soother of the Island. By calling on Shelly to reveal herself to Lee Kaa, Meredith frees him from the burden of his past.

Kaitangata Twitch was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Fiction category.



Figure 1: Meredith is led to a cave.



Figure 1: The Cannibal chief is shouting at Meredith.

International experts' opinions

Almost all of the international experts appreciated the program. They liked different aspects of it. Some found the mystery in the program interesting (female expert, Slovenia) while others appreciated the production value (female expert, USA). "I liked the *Kaitangata Twitch*. The production values were so high, and it was so obviously the rich middle of the story that it just seemed really unusual to have that strong kind of fantasy narrative and that realistic fantasy narrative for kids. Some of the special effects were amazing with the cave that turned into a mouth, with the big teeth thing, and I thought it was really great" (male expert, Canada).

The international experts believed that they needed to watch the full series to understand the program in its entirety. "And if you had watched the first six episodes then you know more about the relationship between the parents and what the dad does, because that was sort of weird" (female expert, USA). Another expert provided her input on the difficulties involved in viewing one episode of the



Figure 3: Shelly shows Meredith the way to escape.



Figure 4: Lee Kaa saves Meredith from a cliff.



Figure 5: Meredith and her father talks about her nightmare.



Figure 6: Lee Kaa will not believe Meredith's story.

series in the festival: “I have seen the whole series, because we actually have it – or actually are going to have it – in Norway. I see it as a folk tale at the same time that it is the civilisation today. I find it is really beautifully made, the whole series, and the actors are really strong all the way through. There is some other problems – you get one episode in the middle of the series, just to see how that worked, I couldn’t grasp the story as I did at home when I watched it, because it was no doubt that it was very beautifully made” (female expert, Norway).

Almost all the international experts admired the character of the girl. “The girl was wonderful. She was just a fantastic actress and carried really a lot of it. It is quite compelling and even not having seen other parts of it. It is really engaging” (female expert, USA). They especially appreciated the role of the girl in the whole context of the program as it was a challenging role to play. “It is actually very heavy – so many things – just pulling in the social, political, environmental, the cultural, the growing up; there were so many layers, and I thought it was very ambitious but I think it really pulled it off, especially with the girl who really felt like she had the shoulders to carry it. Not all the performances were up to hers, but that is hard. But, she really did; she really carried it” (male expert, USA).

There was a lot of curiosity about the girl because of her origin. “In *Kaitangata Twitch*: the girl, the main character, I thought that she was of Maori origin, but her parents weren’t. I couldn’t understand it, because why; is the story something with this?” (female expert, Denmark). They appreciated the dilemma of the girl who belonged to a mixed origin. “The mother is Maori, but just in the shots she didn’t quite look like that. She has grown up in this mixed household, and since we were looking at episode seven, you would have understood a lot of those things. So, a part of what is going on is that the island is awakening her Maori part of her ... and all of this is coming together in this girl’s adolescence” (male expert, Canada).

The program was telecast on Maori TV, the concept of which was explained by the producer from New Zealand who was present there in the discussion. “Maori Television was set up by the government to promote language, and along with language, culture. It has to be 22% Maori language, anything that is ever made for it. The old Maori who is going to teach her everything eventually after they sort out who he is; he speaks in Maori, but always immediately afterwards something in English so you understand” (female expert, New Zealand).



Figure 7: Shelly showed her palm to Lee Kaa and he finally came to believe Meredith.

There was a lot of curiosity among the international experts about the role of the Maoris who are the indigenous people in New Zealand, and the discussion developed about the ways indigenous people are being portrayed on television. “There is always this thing about the indigenous people who have been reduced to a level of just above distinction and whom now can be viewed with compassion and trying to understand their world: it is projected as being somewhat more irrational, magical, and somehow beautiful, and sadly gone or going quickly. This is a sort of standard thing that we westerners have in the portrayal of a lot of these people. I was worried at times: wait a minute; they are swallowing up on a rock, and that wonderful figure there with this wonderfully tattooed face – this

strange mixture, which suddenly ends up in the kind of highlander tradition” (male expert, Germany). A female expert from New Zealand explained the position of Maoris in New Zealand. “Well, first of all, we marry these Maoris. There are no full-blooded Maoris in New Zealand. A Maori is very proud and very tribal, but there are probably only one 16th Maori in New Zealand.”

Some international experts did not find the program appropriate for the audience in the category of 7-11. “I was thinking about whom they were going to show it to, because it was really scary – some parts. If you are seven years old, it is scary for that age – like nightmare scary. Maybe for the more mature 10, 11, or 12. In the age group of 7 to 11 there is a big difference. I would put it for the 10 or 11 years old, but I think 7 years old is quite young for this” (female expert, Sweden). A few also found the program to be too long (female expert, Japan).

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