



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Peppi, please stop it

I sincerely respect Peppi Azzopardi. I wouldn't like this column to be interpreted as anything but a differing opinion. I know of so many positives this man is answerable to which very few know about. Peppi is not only a fine broadcaster but a philanthropist, a campaigner and an activist and has been consistently so for years on end.

One might say that some have a love-hate relationship with Peppi. Many see him as the epitome of civil rights activism whilst others a manipulator of sorts. A number of people consider him to be at the forefront of digging up truth whilst others interpret his behaviour as that of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Several judge him as being gentle and caring whilst the occasional think he is unruly, thoughtless and conveniently sits on the fence.

My opinion of Peppi is that he is an upright and virtuous man. I don't know of many who are so indisputably sensitive to the needs of the people around him. As I've had the opportunity to claim on other occasions he is interested in all that is happening and persistently reaches out to people.

Clearly his trade is that of a broadcaster.

In fact he has managed to keep going on for so many years with a formula that in essence is founded on making good TV out of people's narratives (mainly their pain, suffering and moments of vulnerability) and exploiting the moral panic created by circumstances. He knows how to read the community's mood and reproduce it on TV. This formula works wonders and has had a level of success incomparable with other attempts at making TV any close to successful. A number of TV and radio shows have emulated this model and have seen a surge in the interest shown in their programs. In essence it is a modus operandi based on 'giving the people what they want to see and hear'. In a languid society where voyeurism and indifference is spice of the day it works wonders.

Peppi is a broadcaster who has a product in the form of a TV program he has an interest to point out. I cannot remember a conversation we've had, an interview he was guest to, a status he wrote on his Facebook page where directly or indirectly he doesn't mention Xarabank as if it is the answer to all slits in our social fabric. I really believe he has this misapprehension that Xarabank is the solution to all our woes. This is further compounded by the fact that for him he and Xarabank are one-and-the-same thing. I cannot imagine Peppi not anchoring that programme until his very last breath!

Like many others I am a selective viewer of TV and will not spend my Friday nights watching people screaming their heads off. I will only watch Xarabank on-demand when I know that I can skip through the ads and the inane moments.



Photograph: James Galea

Let's admit it that this program has turned into the most predictable item of broadcasting consumption.

This obviousness makes Xarabank the mother of all clichés. If I had my way I would ask Peppi to go back to the drawing board and start a completely new venture – I am very certain it would be incredibly successful (take *Bi-jografiji* as an example). He is creative enough and very able to re-invent himself. I think we all agree that the potential of a programme to advertise detergents and trips to the Dolomites shouldn't be the only selling point why a program is broadcasted on national TV endlessly.

The model is pretty much the same year after year. An unuly audience and a narrative chased almost obsessively from one week to another. For example, this year it was the turn of Angelik Caruana and his alleged apparitions, convict Godfrey Ellul and the fact that he has been refused parole and some others I might have missed out.

This program also contributes immeasurably to turning people into village clowns. This time it was the turn of Emy Bezzina who was always unconventional but still a candid lawyer in my eyes. Before this circus I used to consider him as an excellent communicator that has some very interesting ideas and wouldn't be bothered to take digs at people. The dim and nonchalant comments Dr Bezzina made during his programme on Smash TV were fodder for Peppi who saw in them

unresolved murders and cold cases and so many more even if he is an anchor who at certain moments has made a shaggy-dog story of what broadcasting should be.

Into the bargain, these last years he has looked tired and fed-up at certain moments and it is only credit to Mark Laurence Zammit that he has kept the program animated.

Then again there is another dimension to Peppi.

I consider him to be the best fund-raiser around. Tele-shopping or collecting money for political parties could easily become his buy. He would manage to sell a *Mazinga Z* robot to an 80 year old if given the chance.

Then again the latest fund-raising campaign focusing on Puttinu Cares, especially the build-up was an affront to the cause. I do recognise that Puttinu is doing a marvellous job. It is one of the NGOs that demonstrate in a tangible way where the money is going proven by the fact that all the big shots have visited the projects of this NGO.

So if we think this is such a brilliant initiative, useful and necessary, what is keeping the State from supporting this concept even more? The pathetic, insulting and demeaning way this campaign has been held is absolutely shameful. We have used children's illness, played on the emotions of parents who might have felt emotionally obliged to talk about their story and Xarabank has made a derision out of the needs that such a situation draws on people.

I'm really curious how the Broadcasting Authority allowed this campaign to go uncontested and how *Agenzija Appogg* approved such exposure of children. We've had Presidents, Commissioners of Children and even researchers expressing themselves clearly that exposing children is unhealthy, detrimental and noxious, in other words objectionable. Collecting such funds is brilliant. Creating such awareness on the plight of children is equally good. Thrashing, trouncing and thumping on people's pain is a no-go as far as I'm concerned.

Peppi please stop doing this. In the short term we might be filling a gap but what happens when you are gone? What ensues when these children have to face their peers? This is their story and they have a right to live it in private and we as a community have a duty to provide without the need for heart wrenching moments to do so.

This issue will be discussed during *Ghandi xi Nghid* on *Radjju Malta* [93.7FM] this Saturday 2/4/16 at 9.05am

"Ghandi xi Nghid"

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