



# ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

## Angels and *Xarabank*

I must admit, I'm no keen *Xarabank* consumer, far from it. It's not just about the programme style and content that doesn't fit my TV pursuit but I, like many others, am a selective TV viewer.

In fact, Friday nights, which are sacrosanct, are more willingly spent in the company of family and a glass of wine as I chomp through a Hollywood blockbuster.

But I suppose there are always exceptions to the rule, and last Friday was a case in point!

After the widespread promotional campaign on TVM announcing that Angelik's visions on Borg in-Nadur and the surroundings will be discussed during that week's edition of *Xarabank*, I took the plunge and watched it, captivated and focused on nothing else.

Considering that it was Carnival and Sanremo weekend, *Xarabank* producers had the nerve to intentionally design a programme that managed to keep scores of people hooked on the national broadcaster instead of zapping off to Rai Uno. But apart from the strategically (intentioned or not) smart move to have such a spellbinding theme on the schedule at hand, all hell broke loose and this programme ended up headlining most people's statuses on their Facebook pages, most claiming, for one reason or other, that the programme shouldn't have been aired (that is, after they had seen it from beginning to end!).

If anything, the quasi-crazy behaviour of Angelik, the melodrama acted out by the members of the panel (most brandishing a Bible as if they are on some pulpit at the *Paroċċa* or at the Saphire Hall), made religion sound mindless.

Another low was that Peppi must make a clean breast that he is starting to struggle with highly opinionated panels. John Bundy and Dione Borg, presenter and journalist respectively, at one

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point were taking over. The same did Pastor Gordon Manche' and Dun Gorg Dalli who were trying to act righteously but at a certain point even they were clowning their arguments and gesticulating thoughtlessly.

Ramon Casha, the self-professed atheist, was more of a pot-stirrer than making proper arguments.

The irate squeaking voice of the lady on the right of the screen, sitting near her husband (in growing embarrassment) both staunch supporters of Angelik of Borg in-Nadur, made non-arguments.

But one thing the panel and Peppi succeeded in doing was that they managed to float-up the viewers' angels and demons which is why I think this programme was so widely watched.

Let's keep one thing in mind. People keep watching a programme because they are

either curious, entertained or both. This was the case of *Xarabank* last Friday. And whilst I really believe that this series that has been going on for almost 20 years might need to be put on ice for the next 20, if truth be told people see it in flocks when such social phenomena, that are close to home, are disputed.

Back to Angelik and his tomfoolery.

The argument thrown around whether such a programme should be allowed to be broadcasted on national TV or not is an anathema for me.

We already have our share of dull programmes on our national broadcaster. If we take away the contentious programmes, the ones that put an effort in production (rather than just re-creating radio on TV) it would be a disaster in terms of audience ratings.

Educational (I find this terribly patronising) or not, informative or not, the base line is whether people are keen to watch a programme.

Now you can criticise Peppi till the sun turns blue, but at least in this show once again he used his *Xarabank*-wit and got people to watch, through the use of camera, employing poignant features, engaging the feisty spectators, timely one-to-one interviews and the rest. He got the audience at home to form or confirm an opinion, to give a ruling on Angelik's genuineness, to reflect on their beliefs (or lack of) and to question incontestable issues like apparitions and Godly interventions.

So at the same moment when we were all trying to decipher if Borg in-Nadur is anywhere nearer to Heaven, most of us were in their heart of hearts trying to come to terms with our

own demons.

Most people watching were asking if there is any hidden message that God is telling us via these contended visualisations;

Whether we might need to check the direction we are giving to our life;

Whether the claimed miracles, visions and signs had any truth in them;

Whether the Devil is really bothered that much with Angelik and his high jinks;

Whether what this unadorned man from Birzebbuga is saying, who carries his obese self with difficulty and is hardly intelligible especially with that lisp, is true.

So whilst the oil (whether olive or sunflower) drips from the figurine, and the tears stream out of the statuette of the Madonna, and the salt comes in droves, and the Host appears out of nowhere and turns into meat, and people are confused with the blood that is pasted on the face of the *Sinjura* - we wonder and keep doubting if any of Angelik's hullabaloo might be true and if there is a message being directed towards 'me'.

Now if this is not a brawny way of doing TV, what is?

My biggest qualm in all of Friday's programme is that if we suspect that Angelik might be delusional, hallucinating, barmy or has some other mental health issue I believe that ethical concerns come into play and so all of what I said becomes outmoded and the programme should not have been broadcasted to safeguard the person's and his family's integrity in the first place. Nothing should come, not even if it was the best of television, between the narrative and the storyline.

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# ~~Bomb~~ ~~blast~~ ~~destroys~~ ~~London~~ ~~bus~~

Three people are feared dead and eight have been hurt after a bomb exploded on a double-decker bus in the heart of London's West End.

The front of the bus was destroyed by the force of the blast on the Aldwych near the

Strand.

The bus had travelled over Waterloo Bridge along Lancaster Place and was passing a Ministry of Defence building and turning onto Aldwych when the bomb exploded.

The explosion comes just nine days after the IRA ended its ceasefire with a bombing in the Docklands area of London, which killed two people.

Scotland Yard says it received no warning of the explosion which happened at 11.38pm.

The blast, thought to have been on a New Cross to King's Cross bus, could be heard five miles (eight kilometres) away and witnesses described devastation at the scene.

Six people have been taken to St Thomas's Hospital. Three of the injured have "significant" head injuries.

A further two people have been taken to University College Hospital.

One man is "serious but stable" in intensive care while another was admitted with minor cuts.

Three of the casualties were in two cars in front of the bus when the explosion hap-



pened.

Paul Rowan, 31, a BBC employee, described how the bus was a tangled mess, with metal and glass scattered over about 50 yards.

"I saw one woman who looked in a very bad way. She was face down on the road with bad-looking head injuries. There was

blood all over the place."

Ten ambulances, five fire engines and four paramedic units were called to the scene.

A large area of the Strand was cordoned off amid fears over another device and police with loudspeakers warned people to move away or to stay inside restaurants, theatres and hotels.

Charing Cross railway station was closed, preventing many people from catching their last trains home to south-east London and Kent.

No-one has admitted carrying out the attack but one theory is that the bomb exploded as it was being taken to another destination in London.

Detectives are sifting through the wreckage and the London Central bus company is to hand a tape from the video recorder fitted to the bus over to Scotland Yard for examination.

The Prime Minister John Major was being briefed by officials at 10 Downing Street about the attack. The Irish government condemned the explosion as "an appalling outrage".