



# ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

## Peppi's shenanigans

Peppi Azzopardi is probably one of the most liked and disliked personalities in Malta all at one go.

and Peppi, Peppi and *Xarabank* have become inordinately predictable. There are moments when it feels as if this man has said all that he had to say. Even the programme themes and guests line-up have become foreseeable. The Malta Song for Europe, the cyclic programmes to collect money and the formulaic political debates have become mind numbing. I also believe that at this point in time, (even if middling attempts have been made in this regard) *Xarabank* really needs to re-invent itself, bring in new ingredients to the show but still retain the spine of the program, that is, the audience that sit through the discussion.

But in this column I would like to go beyond the *Xarabankism*. I want to go back to Peppi. We all know where Peppi comes from. He has a working class background. He believes in the worker's gripes, has maintained himself as a champion for defenseless and helpless people and retains the ability to communicate in simple comprehensible language, although I believe he is a copiously intelligent person.

Peppi is familiar with the 'system' and also knows how to throw a spanner in the works. He has the capacity to read the signs of the times and to capture the public opinion's psyche and ride the crest. He will provoke without necessarily confronting but will stand his ground even if criticism starts coming from all directions. It's a fact that Peppi gets his muscle from his popularity.

Let's face it, he is creative and understands the potential of broadcast, especially TV, like no other. He manages to come across to people, a rare quality in our current crop of broadcasters. He knows exactly what is happening. He is obsessed and gripped with his work and is still the idealist he was in the 80s, now using the TV as a medium (instead of *tan-Numri* and political activism) still believing he might be able to bring change. He has strength knowing that people feel that exposure on *Xarabank* is worth its weight in gold, whether it is to recuperate 'one's' image, to share an experience of injustice or to simply have the 'ara rajtek fuq it-televixin' moment!

In other words, Peppi is influential and commanding.

He manages his persona well, but I admit, there are moments he does get on my nerves when he sits on the moral high ground, for example when he doesn't differentiate between the 'perpetrator of violence' and the 'victim of aggression' - and ends up interpreting both as being equal sufferers.



But there is brilliance in this personality. He is no run-of-the-mill journalist, that's for sure - unique I might add.

Some or many might not agree, but Peppi is caring, thoughtful and compassionate. He retains contact with people who are incarcerated, people who have no one to visit them. He meets sick people, parents who have passed through horrendous experiences, young people who are struggling with drug addiction and he does all of this in silence.

He takes a personal interest in what people are going through in their life. What worries me, on a human level, is that this man seems to be governed by a pathological sense of guilt.

Peppi understands that real, human journalism is created around people's narratives. He listens to the grief, takes note and tries to do something about it. First-rate broadcasters owe it to 'the people'.

As a matter of fact, Peppi is one of the few who practises journalism and social work at the same time. In terms of living the pain with the people, Peppi does it. He loves and is

devoted to people.

This doesn't mean that he doesn't hit a wrong chord at times

For example, I keep finding the heart-wrenching clips he produces during the telethons as irritating. Using mind games, even to collect money, is in itself unfortunate and awkward. Having said that, I do understand that there are categories of people that need money and it's either that or no chemotherapy. Organisations like *Dar tal-Providenza*, Caritas and Puttinu Cares need the funds to keep giving an impeccable service. So we do need to put everything in perspective. Apart from that, another positive is that in these campaigns people do come out of their nest and realise that there is always a reality, which is bigger than the few square meters around them.

Once again, I feel that Peppi is no hero.

At times his arguments are warped and if I had to suggest anything to him, it would be to go back to the drawing board occasionally and check out what he is saying and how he is

thinking. He really does need to separate the wheat from the chaff in his arguments, something he doesn't do that often. Not only that, over time Peppi is coming across as humdrum and would do with a sabbatical to refresh.

We agree that Peppi and controversy are never far away from each other. Recently he triggered a hullabaloo, some alleged he goaded intentionally. In a Facebook status he contested the political slogan, '*Malta l-ewwel u qabel kollox*', stating that this is essentially rubbish sending the PL supporters in a wobbly. All hell broke loose and I am sure the diehards were already fantasising seeing the guillotine roll out of the museum!

But my argument goes beyond the in/appropriateness of what he said.

The value of Peppi is that he manages to surface where our communities lie on such affairs. For example, what we draw from such an instance is that we still live in a society, in a country that is far from any sense of reconciliation, from any hope of coming together. We are an incestual community, interested in our own, and it seems that all our charitable gallantry and valour go down the drain once we think that people are treading in our comfort zone.

This incidence, provoked and motivated by Peppi, shows that this country is still intolerant. The idiosyncrasy of all of this is that we are the same nation that sends peacekeepers in dangerous conflict areas, and our Armed Forces are engaged, day-in and day-out, in rough seas to save and shelter people. Sad indeed.

But that is why it is unfortunate that people like Peppi are so rare a species. It's not what Peppi says that is important at the end of the day, but what Peppi does to the collective thinking that is significant.

I will not go down the road of idol worshiping, never done that, never will do, but I do acknowledge the fact that if we really had to think hard about it, not having Peppi around these last four decades would have been a loss.

He stirs, but not only. He is ready to take it on himself and take the punches hoping that people are provoked into changing their communities for the better.

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