

Two and a Half Heroes

How far can storytelling go in children's TV?

Two and a Half Heroes (Martin Busker, Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, Germany) tells the story of the unusual friendship that develops between Luka and Umut. The talkative Umut is of Turkish descent and barely pauses for breath as he strives to be a policeman, a secret agent or perhaps a bodyguard (cf. screenshot 1). Luka is mute and communicates only through a bizarre hand puppet (cf. screenshot 2). The two imaginative loners meet by chance: Umut is forced by his brother's gang to rob Luka (cf. screenshot 3) and coincidentally saves him from leaping to death (cf. screenshot 4). Together, they roam the streets of Stuttgart to find money for the gang and start having fun together (cf. screenshot 5). When Umut discovers that Luka's mother had died in the neglected flat, he visits the "crime scene" and organizes a birthday party/wake (cf. screenshot 6). At some point during the strange, but dignified ceremony the place accidentally goes up in fire (cf. screenshot 7). At the end of this eventful day, Umut confronts his brother's gang to keep away from them, but goes overboard with it. Both get beaten up, but celebrate their newly gained freedom. Finally, Umut adopts Luka as his brother (cf. screenshot 8).

Two and a Half Heroes was the winner of the 12-15 category at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. It was awarded the prize of the International Youth Jury.

International experts' opinions

International experts shared their opinions about the programme during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. They unanimously praised the programme's look and the acting of the main cast. The experts were divided on the content: Some mentioned that the protagonists' many issues are only touched on, but not thoroughly examined by the story, while others liked Luka's and Umut's active role despite difficult circumstances.

"It is a very interesting film with fabulous acting. It dealt with very, very, very serious problems, I think, maybe too many problems at once, because it's different problems all in one." (male expert, Poland)

"It is one production that I enjoyed very much watching. It reminded me of these buddy movies: *Manpower*." (male expert, Zambia)

The unorthodox humour of the programme was subject of debate. It mostly centred on the birthday party for Luka's deceased mother. The experts wondered about their own response to the scene, and questioned how adolescents would respond to it:

"I'm torn between finding it shocking and charming the way they made up the dead mother and threw her a party." (male expert, USA)

"There is a certain kind of humour in it, which I loved a lot. But I'm not sure if the target group will have the same opinion. Is this interesting for someone who is 13 or 14 years old?" (female expert, Germany)

Another controversial issue was the use of slang and swear words:

"There is cursing. I think as a programme maker for young adults you have some responsibility." (male expert, Netherlands)

"I think sometimes those words were used, because the writers and the producers wanted it to be in the authentic teen language. Most of it didn't bother me, but we would have a problem with that too in America." (female expert, USA)

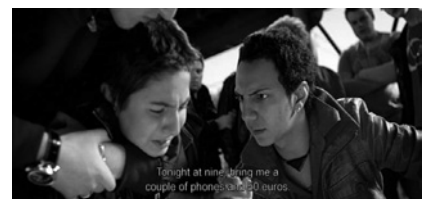
Many discussion groups wondered about the intended audience. They agreed that a production coming from a film school might take more creative liberties:



Ill. 1: 12-year-old Umut on his mission to support the police



Ill. 2: Luka, 13 years old, with his sock puppet



Ill. 3: Umut is forced to steal by his brother's gang

“If this kind of film was produced by children’s TV producers, some things probably would have been different. Right from the start, people working at a children’s department would have said: you cannot show them burning the living room, and you cannot show alcohol, and you cannot do this and that ...” (female expert, Germany)

Opinions from teenagers in 7 countries

The PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 included the votes of an international youth jury, which was organized in co-operation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12 and 15 in 7 countries discussed and judged 12 programmes in the category 12 to 15. Here is a summary of their discussions on *Two and a Half Heroes*.



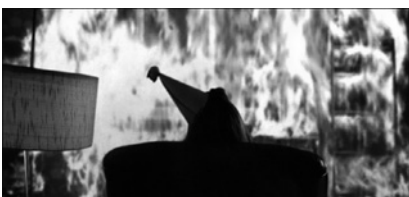
Ill. 4: Umut saves Luka from jumping off a bridge



Ill. 5: Umut and Luka are having fun together



Ill. 6: They make Luka's deceased mother up



Ill. 7: Birthday candles set the flat on fire



Ill. 8: Umut asks: Can a Turk adopt a German? Yes!

The **Australian** youth jury praised the actors and found the story to be especially well-made and well-thought-out: “It was a good movie. That’s why you remember it.” For them, the humour was exceptional, and surprisingly different: “Really creepy, but funny.”

In **Cuba**, the youth jury emphasized the importance of friendship and solidarity which they found in the programme. Some referred to Luka as an autistic person or outsider: “The film shows how it is possible to begin a friendship so deep with a kid as Luka that seems to be an autistic”, and that he would benefit from being friends with Umut: “Only friendship can change fear into real love between friends; friendship changes us completely and makes us forget about bad things.” This is something everyone could identify with and it made the hard parts of the story easier: “It was also sad for showing the death of Luka’s mother, although it ends happily because they end as friends.”

The youth jury from **Egypt** had mixed opinions. On the one hand, they praised the story: “Very good idea.” Some especially liked the relation between Luka and his sock puppet. On the other hand they expressed lack of understanding, e.g. “It is not logical that the boy lives with a dead person”, and found it “not suitable for us Egyptians”, as a story like this would not happen in their communities.

In **Macedonia**, the youth jury called the story “boring” and “depressing”. They mentioned that programme makers “should not promote this kind of speech”. However, they praised the “impressive acting” by the 2 young actors.

The youth jury from **Nigeria** commented that the friendship between Luka and Umut was something special: “It’s not a normal story that everyone can see every day.” Many praised the programme for being “interesting” and “very funny”. Some disapproved of the slang and the depicted violence: “The only problem were the bad words and the way people were fighting.” Some were equally critical of Luka’s attempted suicide, as this would be difficult to digest for young viewers.

The youth jury in the **Philippines** was sympathetic towards Luka being an “outcast”. They were glad that he was able to find a friend. One member liked in particular the friendship between Luka and Umut “that he was closer to his friend than to his brother”. Others were concerned about Luka’s suicide attempt and found it unethical that Umut would steal for the gang.

In the **United States**, the youth jury liked it very much as the film involved them emotionally and made them connect to the characters. Several stressed the exceptional acting. One member mentioned: “It was really random in the beginning.” A girl found the scene with the dead mother in the flat “really creepy”.

Dr. Elke Schlote (IZI, Munich, Germany)