
Auntie's anguish

We don't like to be seen as bagging a revered cultural institution, but is Auntie ABC really in such drastically reduced circumstances that she has to schedule pernicious drivel in TV prime time? I refer, of course, to the Summer replacement programme that goes under the title *Psychic Investigators*.

At first we thought they were pulling our legs; and that the advertised programme would turn out to be a clever imported comedy along the lines of *People Like Us* or *Little Britain*, but they weren't. They chose, instead, to subject their loyal and dedicated viewers a show whose ludicrous premise was only matched by its appalling execution.

A joint Canadian-British co-production, *Psychic Investigators* purports to show how psychics assist police in solving crimes. As seems to have become the fashion with pseudo-documentaries, it followed a pattern of five minutes exposition, followed by a minute or so of recapitulation, then back to exposition again. It is not certain whether this reflects a programme designed to allow plenty of commercial breaks, or that people who like this sort of tripe have very short attention spans. Add this to other common pseudo-doco trends of sepulchral voice-overs, quick scene changes, extreme close-ups of mouths and eyes and you have a really annoying TV experience (unless you are a trainee ophthalmic or oral surgeon, one supposes).

What the first episode presented was the story of a young man who went missing in Wales in 2001. After a few days police, suspecting foul play, investigated, found evidence that he might have been murdered, carried out scientific tests, interviewed two suspects, each of whom implicated the other, and obtained a confession. They did not find a body, which the officer in charge thought might have lessened the chance of a conviction. (The recent NSW case of Bruce Burrell, convicted of murdering Mrs Kerry Wheelan, whose body has not been found, shows that though this might make the prosecution more difficult, it is by no means

impossible.) In the Welsh case, the main suspect was arrested, charged, convicted and sentenced to a long prison term. His accomplice was given a lesser sentence. Pretty straight forward stuff — good police work, but hardly the basis for an exciting TV documentary.

Meanwhile, the victim's grieving sister, dissatisfied with progress, consulted a local psychic, who convinced her that by using tarot cards she could communicate with her (perhaps) dead brother's spirit. What ensued was generalised chat about restless spirits, vague references to alleged events and places, but little that would convince anyone other than a vulnerable grieving relative. More drama followed as the psychic called on other psychics to use their own methods of contacting the departed (though they weren't even specific about him having departed until well after the police were convinced that a murder had occurred).

According to the show, the psychic and the police often came to similar conclusions, and in the melodramatic method that characterises such shows, sought to suggest that the psychic was at least as well-informed as were the professionals. There is a glaring inconsistency here; contemporary details of the police work will be logged in police and court records; the psychic, who was interviewed some years after the event, relied on memory. It is not impossible, indeed it is quite likely, that much of what the psychic claimed to 'remember' was information she had gleaned from the public records. They even had the gall to intimate that the police were somehow at fault for not consulting psychics

It will hardly surprise *Skeptic* readers that the news that this appalling rubbish was scheduled to replace one of the few programmes that looks at science seriously, *Catalyst*, caused outrage among Skeptics. Many of us have complained, and as there are another 11 programmes still to come (at our time of going to press) you should too. After all, it is supposedly 'our' ABC, and 'we' have every right to express our displeasure at being treated to this sort of Bent-Spoon-worthy piffle.

Finally, there is some good news. A mole in the ABC tells us that *Psychic Investigators* attracted 300,000 fewer viewers for its first show compared with *Catalyst*.

Rip off

Our thanks to Kevin McDonald of Balickera, who sent us the story about the psychic who tricked a number of women in Sydney out of large sums of money, including the life savings (over \$300 000) of one woman. The scam consists of the con woman asking her victims to leave large amounts of money and jewellery with her so she could "cleanse it of evil". We have heard about similar scams in the past, which have netted large sums for the unscrupulous criminals,

Kevin is also concerned by recent calls for a National Day of Prayer to relieve the drought. Well that one worked, didn't it?

Strange attractions

And thanks also to Brian Miller from Adelaide who sent us the following advice from a jeweller.

Please make your staff aware that magnetic jewellery can affect the workings of a watch. We have had a customer complaint where a watch has come back 3 times because it was losing time, this customer was getting very angry and wanted a new watch. When I queried about magnetic jewellery I found out this lady wears magnetic bracelets on both wrists and around her neck. The complaint was solved and the customer realised it was her fault. Also some people do have magnetic underlays or pillows and if they wear their watch to bed or place it next to their bed; this could also cause problems to their watch.

And that's not to mention that covering a fridge door with magnets does not protect the contents, so why would anyone imagine they would protect their health?

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