

Ecstasy Rising

Peter Jennings's astonishing
prime-time documentary

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The Peter Jennings documentary “Ecstasy Rising,” which aired April 1, 2004, on ABC, left me wanting to watch it again with my mother.

In what was surely the first time on major network television, the hour-long special discussed the beneficial uses of MDMA and the harms inherent in government misinformation about drugs. Those interviewed included Rick Doblin, Sasha Shulgin, Ralph Metzner, Steve Kish, and MDMA researcher Dr. Charles Grob. Most poignantly, the show included interviews with a woman expressing her gratitude for an MDMA experience 20 years ago that helped her cope with the trauma of rape.

A major focus in the documentary was the ineffectiveness of government warnings about drugs when based on exaggerated and/or unreliable information, like that taken from the flawed research conducted by Dr. George Ricaurte. Jennings discussed Dr. Ricaurte's retracted dopaminergic neurotoxicity study claiming that MDMA caused Parkinson's disease, and interviewed researchers who questioned his previous work on serotonin (that formed the basis of NIDA's anti-Ecstasy educational campaign, which gave the false impression that MDMA causes holes in the brain).

Marsha Rosenbaum of the Drug Policy Alliance wrote, “In all the years I've been watching networks of all kinds doing shows about drugs of all kinds, never have I seen such a factual, honest, balanced program. The producers truly 'got it' and they had the guts to run a show that seriously counters the governments' line.”

Dale Gieringer, of California NORML, said, “Peter Jennings' Primetime Special 'Ecstasy Rising' was truly epochal. This is the first time since the Sixties I can remember a drug portrayed in so positive a light... This could mark the start of a monumental shift in the public perception of illegal drugs!”

Unsurprisingly, Drug Czar John Walters, the Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, complained to ABC about the program. U.S. Congressman Mark Souder (R-IN) condemned it as well, saying that Peter Jennings was lacking a “moral compass.” In response to these criticisms, MAPS and the Drug Policy Alliance organized letter-writing campaigns to thank ABC for their honest and balanced coverage. The show's co-producer, Jordan Kronick, wrote MAPS, saying, “The quantity and quality of positive letters has been outstanding. Thanks very, very much.”

According to the producers, over ten million people tuned in to this historic show. MAPS members organized viewings of the documentary in eleven cities, from San Francisco to Spokane to Brooklyn! On ABC's website message boards, viewers held a lively discussion about the show, with most comments quite favorable.

If you would also like to watch the special with your mother (or your kids), MAPS has copies available, along with the ABC *World News Tonight* two-minute feature story on MAPS' MDMA/PTSD study which also aired on April 1, and Peter Jennings' April 1 interview on *Larry King Live*, in which he expressed his surprise at the misinformation about Ecstasy put forth by NIDA and other government officials.

You can purchase a copy in one of two ways: 1) Make a \$15.00 donation on the MAPS website and write “for Ecstasy Rising documentary” in the “Notes” section, or 2) Mail a \$15.00 check or money order to: MAPS, 2105 Robinson Avenue, Sarasota, FL 34232. Please specify whether you would like VHS or DVD.

The “Ecstasy Rising” documentary is yet another piece of evidence that a cultural shift is underway, one that MAPS is both benefiting from and helping to create. •

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