

Citation for Adrián Paenza, Leelavati Prize 2014

Adrián Paenza has been awarded with the Leelavati Prize 2014 because of his decisive contribution in changing the mind of a whole country about the way that mathematics is perceived in daily life. He has accomplished this through his books, his TV programs, and his unique gift of enthusiasm and passion in communicating the beauty and joy of mathematics.

At a very young age he received his PhD degree in Mathematics and taught at the University of Buenos Aires between 1979 and 2002. During many years he pursued a parallel life as a successful TV Sports Journalist, and also as a Political Journalist. Since 2003 he found a way to integrate his mathematical background with his journalism experience: he started a shining career as a Science Journalist.

- He has been the host of the long running weekly TV program “Científicos Industria Argentina” (“Scientists Made in Argentina”), currently in its twelfth consecutive season in an open TV channel. Each program, with a beautiful and attractive interface, consists of interviews to mathematicians and scientists of very different disciplines, and ends with a mathematical problem, whose solution is given in the next program.
- He also has been the host of the TV program “Alterados por Pi” (“Altered by Pi”), a weekly half hour show exclusively dedicated to popularize maths. The show is recorded in front of a live audience in several public schools around the country.
- Since 2005, he has written a weekly column about general science, but mainly about mathematics, on the back page of “Página 12”, one of Argentina’s three national newspapers. His articles include historical notes, teasers and even proofs of theorems.
- He wrote eight books dedicated to the popularization of mathematics: five under the name “Matemática...¿estás ahí?” (“Math... are you there?”), published by Siglo XXI Editores, which have sold over a million copies. The first of the series, published in September 2005, headed the lists of best sellers for a record of 73 consecutive weeks, and is now in its 22nd edition. The enormous impact and influence of these books has extended throughout Latin America and Spain; they have been published in Portugal, Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, and recently translated also to Chinese language for a next coming edition.

It is remarkable that, by his personal generosity, all his books were made freely available at the Department of Math of the University of Buenos Aires from the first day of publication and sale.

Paenza also has been always a champion of the public and free education. He introduced the idea (which was later implemented by the Argentinean Education Minister) of developing a Federal program for digital literacy, inspired by the program “One laptop per child”. His books are distributed with no cost in these free laptops.

Nicholas Negroponte has said about his nomination:

I know Adrián and his work very well. He is an inspiration and a hero for mathematics. His presence in the USA and Argentina has inspired many young people.....not to mention the whole Spanish speaking world. I cannot imagine a more qualified nomination.

And John Sulston said:

How delighted I am that Adrián Paenza is nominated for the prize. It is clear from the record that he has an enormous range and reach, and is widely appreciated for his lucid presentations. He was intensely interested not only in the science, but also by the insistence of me and my colleagues on open data release. This is a theme that he has returned to himself many times, defending the importance of public and free education for everyone without cost restrictions. He and I therefore found a shared passion during our conversation, and I greatly admire the work he has done. I think Adrián is a wonderful candidate for the Leelavati Prize.