



## Dear *I Can Dream Theatre*: a love letter to an amazing group

It's January 2021, and the globe is completely at a standstill because of a worldwide pandemic. I think I might have been the only one who was naïve enough to think that things weren't going to shut down entirely like they did – I mean was there a precedent in our lifetime to compare to? But I was wrong. And we were all in our homes, building new routines for our new hermitic way of living.

Usually in January, *I Can Dream Theatre* would be raring to start rehearsing with their neurodiverse cast members and get ready to put on a new production in the fall. But like 2020, 2021 wasn't looking like a show was going to happen.

The cast of *I Can Dream Theatre* are some of the most passionate and dedicated people to subscribe to a group. They LOVE putting shows together and getting together with each other. In every of the word, *I Can Dream Theatre* is a family made up of chosen members, who have connected and collaborated in such an artistic and expressive way.

Having another year without a show, I knew was going to be heartbreaking to say the least for everyone.

It occurred to me in late 2020 that 2021 was going to mark *I Can Dream Theatre's* 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Ten years where 8 shows were produced full of hard work, sweat, laughs, repetition and some tears thrown in for good measure. Show or no show, I knew I couldn't let 2021 pass without some sort of acknowledgment of this milestone.

Five years prior, I had made a documentary on *I Can Dream Theatre* called *The Making of a Dream* which really detailed the process it took for the directors, crew and actors to make an *I Can Dream Theatre* performance. It was my first film, I was very green, but we pulled it off. I am my

own harshest critic, so years later when I re-watched the film, I found it to be loving and important, but flawed. My critique obviously came from learning more about putting a film together. But I always thought that should the opportunity come to revisit the story of *I Can Dream Theatre*, I would maybe "correct some things."

Signing up to do a new documentary on *I Can Dream Theatre* was a no brainer for me. My focus this time around was to not have "my voice" be the dominating point of view, but rather the cast. I wanted it to be their words, their speech. I assembled a line of questions that would allow each of them to express themselves. Uncensored. Unfiltered. If they spoke unclearly, then that's what it would be. Their story. Their impact.

I started putting together this film in January 2021. Every current cast member was on board and were so excited to be able to work on a project. I contacted former cast members as well to see if they would be willing to come on board. I am happy that many did take me up on my invitation.

Videos came in throughout the year, and I got my needle and thread and started weaving a story together. The process of making this film was smooth as I incorporated the cast's testimonials on how the group has impacted their lives along with clips from past shows. I wanted the film to be something special for fans of the group, but also an introduction for people who didn't know what *I Can Dream Theatre* was about. I wanted it to be entertaining, but with context as to what can be achieved when you nurture and support someone.

And as much as I was making this film for the cast, the film ended up saving me as well. Creating during a pandemic is the best medicine that one can take. The film saved me as much as it will be of service to those who accept it.

And here we are – my film, which has also been living with me in isolation during these months is now ready to be shared with others. I'm proud of it. I'm happy that it got done, and that more people will be able to see the great stuff that *I Can Dream Theatre* has produced.

I don't know what happens next. But I do know that giving the opportunity for these individuals to speak and have their stories be heard was the greatest honour.

As of December 3, *The Love Letter* is available to stream on YouTube.

*from Merrill Matthews*

Merrill Matthews is the writer, director, and editor of *The Love Letter*. His previous short documentary *Included* won the Honorable Mention award at the 2019 Canada Shorts Film Festival.

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