

by Maurice Krystal

Very often the lessons learned beyond the classroom walls are more lasting than those sitting at desks facing a blackboard. In the field of special education this is more the rule than the exception.

Nine years ago, **Ada Masciarelli**, a teacher at *Summit School*, adapted the play, *Grease*, so students with special needs had the opportunity to succeed on stage. Of course, success in one realm tends to spread over to other areas. Nothing feeds one's ego like hearing laughter and applause.

Over the next eight years **Ada Masciarelli**, **Michele Matthews** and **Tricia Bartley** have adapted three other musical comedies: *Romeo and Julie*, *The Search for Oz* and *The Godfather* for the Summit School Players.

Ada lives on Westland in MoWest. She writes and directs the plays. The actual writing of the script is individualized and takes into account the students' talents and personalities. Ada has been in the field of special education for the past thirty years, both as a childcare worker and educator. Her dream was to be on stage or become a writer. Now she has found a way to meld her two loves.

Michele lives in St. Lambert and is the musical director and choreographer. She has been involved in singing and playing music since the age of six. She has a master's degree in special educa-



## I Can Dream: performing arts for individuals with special needs

tion and has been in the field for the past 25 years. The last school year Michele joined the staff of Giant Steps, another special education school.

Tricia lives in NDG and is the rookie with only 18 years in the field and is the production assistant. She is the one who does all the organizing of kids, parents, rehearsals and behaviour management.

In August 2011, Ada, Michele and Tricia decided to form the *I Can Dream Theatre Group*. Though *Summit School* gave them their first opportunity, they realized they could only go so far if the theatre group remained within the school setting.

The first production of the new group is *Love Trek*; a combination of *Star Trek* meets *The Love Boat*. There are presently 17 members and they want to open it up to the public. To join one has to be an individual with special needs who is at least 18 and has some interest in acting, singing, dancing, or playing a musical instrument. There will be auditions in

December for the next production.

After talking to the three ladies, I went into the living room to meet the members of the cast who patiently waited for the adults. **Andrew Perez** volunteered to go first. He sees himself as a natural comedian and plays the role of Mr. Spock. He joined the group on his mother's urging. **Fareed Gul** plays Captain Stubing from *Love Boat*. He enjoys the audience's applause. **Amanda Whitford** plays the role of Ginger Grant. She talked about how performing on stage allows her to be somewhere else and build something from within. **Paul Fernandes** plays the role of Dr. Seuss and performing makes him happy but he has to learn to be patient to learn his lines. **Jessica Ipekian-Levitt** plays the role of Mrs. Howell and she also says that performing makes her happy and she has learned not to be nervous. **Paul Baloukas** plays

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## ***I Can Dream:***

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James Kirk and feels great and proud to be on stage. **Philip Peris** plays Isaac the Bartender. He has been in three productions and gets excited when performing. He especially loves the parties held after the last performance. **Steven Atme** (it's pronounced, Look at me) plays the role of Bones McCoy. He loves composing on the piano and plays the piano in the show. He feels proud but doesn't think one should brag.

The pride and excitement in these young adults was palatable. They do deserve an appreciative audience.

*Love Trek-The Final Frontier* will be playing at Concordia's The Oscar Peterson Hall on Wednesday, October 17; Friday, October 19, 7:30 and Saturday, October 20. All performances at 7:30 pm. Tickets are \$25 and can be obtained by contacting one of the following: [icandreamtheatre@hotmail.ca](mailto:icandreamtheatre@hotmail.ca) [www.admission.com](http://www.admission.com), toll free: 1 855 790-1245.

