

## INDUSTRY NEWS

## CBC TV to air documentary on Toronto slam poet Ian French



*IF performing at the Drake Hotel in Toronto. (photo courtesy of the IF The Poet movie website)*

On Nov. 12, CBC TV is set to premiere a feature-length biopic about Toronto slam poet IF, who made his debut at age 50 and went on to win the Canadian Individual Slam Poetry Championship and compete internationally.

Produced by Toronto-based filmmaker Kim Saltarski through his company, Amazing Ain't It, *If the Poet* follows IF (whose full name is Ian French) from his first dip into performance poetry through to competing nationally in Vancouver in 2014 and consequently, internationally at the World Cup of Slam Poetry in Paris.

“The first time I saw him do slam poetry was my first time at a slam event. His poems touched me with the honest, raw emotion and how clever he was with his words. I also realized this community he’s suddenly become a part of is really special and inspiring,” says director and friend, Saltarski. “Especially when I was introduced to his coach, Ian Keteku, who is this savant, Yoda-like personality

and an amazing artist. Not only did I have a story about a guy who's trying to understand his life through slam poetry, but then he hooked up with a mentor half his age and they have this beautiful personal relationship that evolves. They literally spend hours ripping apart a poem word by word and nuance by nuance, and as an artist, it's so beautiful to be a fly on the wall and witness that and the commitment and passion ... I thought, 'Why don't we do a film about it?'"

Conceived as a 15-minute short film produced and supported by Bell Media, the project evolved into something much bigger after IF won the national championship.

"We were realizing [at the championship in Vancouver] this wasn't a short film, it was a feature film; this was really something special. We just did that crazy filmmaker thing and said, 'Okay, we're going to do it on our own dime,'" Saltarski says. "The ultimate fairy tale ending was that he won, and the winner of the Canadian slam goes to represent Canada in the world, so it was like, 'Oh, this story doesn't stop!' By that point people were asking me, 'What's next?' And I thought, 'I guess I've got to go to Paris and find out.' I committed to – whether I had money or not – go to Paris because we were so deep into it."

Fortunately, after finding out that CBC was rebranding its Doczone slot, Saltarski was able to successfully pitch the project and receive funding for a trip and full crew.

"It seemed like IF would be perfect: a personal story of a world you've never seen, interesting characters, all of this stuff. Lo and behold, before we went to Paris, they green-lighted it," he says. "The advantage he has of getting into it at the age of 50 was he has his whole life to draw on. Instead of how [some slam poets] sometimes talk about the same subjects, with IF there's this wide range of growing up with ADHD, to being in a 30-year marriage and going through marriage counselling, to thoughts on police brutality from the point of view of his young son. Because there are so many stories behind each poem, it's like he's really reflecting his life through poetry, and his life is very interesting and inspiring."

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