

THERAPY DOGS

a film by Ethan Eng



World Premiere
Slamdance Film Festival 2022

Canada, 83 minutes

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Therapy Dogs | SYNOPSIS



Logline

Two best friends set out to create the ultimate senior video for their graduating class of 2019.

Synopsis

In 2019, Ethan and his best friend Justin are students trying to make sense of their high school existence. In what will be the last chapter of their teenage lives and the beginning of adulthood beyond, they decide to make the ultimate senior video in the search for answers. Exploring teenage suburbia in a no-brakes adventure, questions arise whether there's more to their lives than simply growing up.

Therapy Dogs is executive produced by Matthew Miller and Matt Johnson, who took Slamdance by storm in 2013 with their debut feature *The Dirties*, and Sundance in 2016 with *Operation Avalanche*.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“School sucks. While Justin and I were going through high school we were really confused about our lives, and everywhere we tried to find something relatable was met with nostalgic clichés. That’s why we decided to tell a high school story in the midst of living it. There are certain things that only matter when you’re 17 and we wanted to capture that. This is a movie kids today can relate to.

A coming of age story without easy answers.”

– Ethan Eng, Writer/Director/Actor

Development

Therapy Dogs began development in early 2017 when Ethan and Justin were 16. For the next year they started to write about their experiences while also writing about the lives of other students that caught their interest, spinning a web of mythology within their grade. It was a tool for them to make sense of their chaotic lives hurling towards adulthood. This was going to be Ethan and Justin’s escape from high school.

With the help from Matt Johnson and Matthew Miller who previously made a film shot in a real high school *The Dirties* (2013), and snuck into NASA with *Operation Avalanche* (2016). After hearing their pitch to blow all of their college money to make the ultimate high school movie, they agreed to take them in for an internship to knock some sense into them. During the internship they learned more about their guerrilla filmmaking methods and returned to Cawthra with fresh eyes.

The film brought together Ethan's group of friends, a collective of likeminded artists, filmmakers, and musicians. All with a similar vision of rewriting the teenage canon while bringing their individual talents to the project. Most notably Kevin Tseng (Actor) who wanders through school hallways as a drifting shy artist searching for his musical voice. And Kyle Peacock (Actor) who illustrates a neon baked nightmare of a party gone awry. Together everyone contributed to the project both in front and behind the camera.

Therapy Dogs is a real coming of age story set in a contemporary high school that Ethan and Justin were attending. Taking viewers on a ride through their final blowout year with an unfiltered look into the lives of teenagers today.



The Shoot

Unlike most film productions that need permits and background actors to film a realistic school scene, Ethan and Justin were able to just pick up the camera and shoot. By using their school and real students, they managed to capture a completely authentic portrait of high school, giving access into a world adults are kept out of. House parties with underage drinking, abandoned exploration, and death defying teenage stunts are staples of the suburban teenage experience that they were able to freely roam through.

As the year was in constant flux, so was the story. With exceptions to a rough outline, everything that happens in the film was real and unexpected, keeping to the true chaotic nature of high school. Improvisation was key to the film and character arcs were based off of the student's actual lives. Often this would mix into the making of the film itself. When pressures of high school began to fracture Ethan and Justin's friendship, it bled through to the film with nowhere to hide. Everything was exposed to keep it raw and honest.

To capture the different perspectives of high school, multiple cameras were used ranging from GoPro's and cell phones to a professional cinema camera. While the smaller cameras were used as first person footage from Ethan and Justin, an URSA Mini Pro was used as a vantage to overlook the scope of the entire story, giving the audience a rare cinematic view into high school life. While filming, Ethan was able to stash his gear in his locker barely fitting all of it by disassembling his camera and gear.

In order to achieve a realistic portrayal of high school, all of it was filmed under the guise of a yearbook video. And with this they were able to bring the camera inside classrooms, school events, and graduation while covertly mic'ing actors up and conducting scenes. Students opened up to the camera effortlessly revealing their true personalities. This undercover style of shooting is quite thrilling and added an additional coat of authenticity which is quite resonant and carries over onto the screen.

The Edit

The entire film was shot between various cameras capturing nearly every day of high school in 2019 in which Ethan Eng spent a full year alone sorting and editing it into a comprehensible story. While struggling with a dying computer at home, the production company shy kids generously opened their Toronto studio to him letting him use their computers during off-hours. After many late nights editing there it finally came to completion in 2021.

The Music

The film boasts an incredible lineup of current indie and lofi artists. Featuring arguably one of the greatest independent voices of this generation, Sam Ray. The mind behind much beloved projects such as *Teen Suicide*, *Julia Brown*, and *Ricky Eat Acid*. While songs such as *haunt me x3* add a melancholic lofi tinge to the opening of the film, there is also a blissful and quiet ambience with songs from his *Ricky Eat Acid* project painting teenage life as a bittersweet memory.

Therapy Dogs also features musical acts such as the New York hardcore punk band Show Me the Body with their song *K-9* during a wild car stunt. And Morgan Powers, an indie singer songwriter with her song *Black Coffee*.

The Cast

Therapy Dogs was filmed with real students at Cawthra Park Secondary School. Featuring a selection of students that caught Ethan's interest, following their journeys through high school alongside him and Justin's. Only a handful of students were in on the project while others were candid performances. This created a portrait of how teenagers really act, both inside and outside the classroom.



Therapy Dogs | ABOUT THE TEAM

ETHAN ENG (DIRECTOR / WRITER / ACTOR) is a 20 year old filmmaker from Toronto. His debut feature film *Therapy Dogs* will have its World Premiere at Slamdance in January 2022. He is currently working on his next feature film about the 20's and the 2020's *A New Age*.

JUSTIN MORRICE (CO-WRITER, ACTOR) is an actor, stuntman, fighter, and punk. He is the embodiment of the free teenage spirit and the soul of *Therapy Dogs*. He developed the story alongside Ethan Eng and starred in it.

shy kids (PRODUCERS) are a filmmaking and indie pop band collective in Toronto. In 2013, they rebelled against the mainstream with their debut short film *Noah* which won Best Short Film at TIFF. It was the first story told completely within a computer screen bringing a whole new genre of films behind it. Since then they have joined their creative forces with brands such as Tinder, Spotify, and Snapchat.

MATT JOHNSON (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is a filmmaker and actor from Toronto. He co-created the cult comedy series *Nirvana the Band the Show* and directed *The Dirties (2013)*, making waves in the indie film scene for his innovative filmmaking techniques and hi-concept meta storylines. His second feature *Operation Avalanche* premiered at Sundance in 2016. And in 2019 he starred in Kazik Radwanski's *Anne at 13,000 ft*.

MATTHEW MILLER (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is best known for his work with Matt Johnson, whose film *The Dirties* won the Grand Jury Prize at Slamdance in 2013. And *Operation Avalanche* which premiered at Sundance in 2016. As well as producing *Nirvana the Band the Show*. As a writer and director, his films have screened at Sundance, Toronto, Locarno, and Busan. He and Johnson founded Zapruder Films in 2013.

SAM RAY (COMPOSER) is one of indie music's most treasured icons. The voice behind wildly successful musical projects such as *Teen Suicide*, *Julia Brown*, and *Ricky Eat Acid*. For the last 10 years, his songs have captured the voice of a generation. From grungy lo-fi sounds to ethereal electronic bliss, his music has been a mainstay in the cutting edge.

Therapy Dogs | CREDITS



Justin JUSTIN MORRICE
Ethan ETHAN ENG
Kevin KEVIN TSENG
Kyle KYLE PEACOCK
Mitchell MITCHELL CIDADE
Sebastian SEBASTIAN NEME
Andrew ANDREW MICHALKO
Thomas THOMAS PALEWICZ
Jayden JAYDEN FROST

Director ETHAN ENG
Writers ETHAN ENG
JUSTIN MORRICE
Producer shy kids
Executive Producers MATTHEW MILLER
MATT JOHNSON
Cinematographer ETHAN ENG
Editor ETHAN ENG
Composer SAM RAY
VFX Consultant STEVE ROBERTS
Additional Camera CULLEN MCFATER
THOMAS ADAMSON
JOSEPH WALKER
JEAN MARTIN

Therapy Dogs | CONTACT INFORMATION



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