



Justin Schafer plays real-life photographer Samuel Lockhart in Danny Schur's latest play.

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Hop aboard for a historical journey

EVER wonder what it was like to be a roving reporter on the streets of Winnipeg, circa 1919? Grab your notebook and get ready to go on the time-travelling assignment of a lifetime.

Danny Schur, the writer-producer who brought the Winnipeg General Strike back to life, has written a new one-man play and he's casting the audience as the "ink-stained scribblers" who get to help an intrepid photographer document the defining and divisive event known as Bloody Saturday.



CAROLIN VESELY

Oh yes, and you'll be carrying out your assignment aboard a moving heritage trolley.

"I've never done a play on a moving vehicle, so that brings up all kinds of wacky logistics that you don't think about in the darkness of a theatre," says Schur, whose general-strike repertoire already includes a stage musical, a CBC radio play and walking tours. He most recently co-authored a screenplay he co-wrote for a feature film that he hopes will shoot in Manitoba next year.

Sam's Spiel stars recent University of Winnipeg theatre graduate Justin Schafer as Sam Lockhart, one of the young and ambitious real-life "stringers" who Schur says competed to get their work in the press — and on the newly introduced news "wire" for publication in papers across the country

TheatrePreview

Sam's Spiel

- Aboard a moving heritage trolley
- Saturday, 1 p.m. and July 15 (future dates to be announced)
- Tickets \$25 at 226-TOUR (8687)

— back in the day when newspapers didn't hire full-time photographers.

The idea for the hour-long play was sparked by a dozen new and unpublished photographs from the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike that were uncovered at the Manitoba Archives last fall. While most of the photos could be credited to well-known freelancers from that era — namely L.B. Foote, best known for his iconic shot of a leaning streetcar — half of them bore no name. But one name from that era that did show up often in the archives, in general, was Samuel Lockhart.

"I sensed there was a paparazzi story here," Schur recalls. "In *Strike!*, I investigated the milieu of the Slavic-Jewish North End, but then I thought, there's this whole other milieu of the working-class Anglo — more specifically, these photographers.

"They would bound up these six-storey buildings that lined Main Street, get to the top, take a shot and bound down again and go across the street. They were moving with these big-format cameras, so they were athletic, intrepid guys.

"It got me wondering, what was their story? Or in the case of this missing guy, what was his story?"

Samuel Lockhart's story, at least in the theatrical world, is that this ambi-

tious and highly competitive hired lens is also an inventor and budding entrepreneur. And he is on a mission to get *The Shot* that will earn him enough cash to patent his revolutionary new... instant camera?

"When I started doing the research, I found that a fully functioning instant camera was patented in 1923, so it would've been in use for years before the strike," Schur says.

The premise of *Sam's Spiel* is that Lockhart has been hired by the new wire service to cover the events of Bloody Saturday (June 21, 1919). To gain a competitive edge, his wire boss has hired one of the city's wireless trolleys to take him and a bunch of hired pens (the audience, capacity of 32 people) from across the country to the scenes of the now-infamous action.

Schur says the plot will take a "wicked, very, very plausible" surprise twist as to who Samuel Lockhart really is and what exactly was involved in the invention of the first instant camera.

His "interactive trolley play" is a theatrical tour through a pivotal episode of Winnipeg's history, but it also speaks to larger issues that are still relevant nearly a century later, Schur says.

"At its heart, *Sam's Spiel* is about the necessity of eternal vigilance in a democracy, and the role a free press plays in that vigilance."

Saturday's performance departs from the Winnipeg Free Press News Café, 237 McDermot Ave., at 1 p.m. Schur will host an after-performance discussion at the café.

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