

## **THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT**

*Project Description and Proposal – June, 2033*

**THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT** is an immersive theatre experience which tells the true story of that summer day in 1933, when a full-scale race riot broke out between a group of Nazi-sympathizing baseball fans and the mostly Jewish fans of the opposing team. The brawl lasted into the night and remains the worst race riot in Canadian history. The riot had an immediate and profound impact on the Jewish and Italian communities (who as Catholics were also targeted) that is still felt to this day. It also undermined the squeaky-clean image of “Toronto the Good”. Yet despite this horrific display of racist, anti-Semitic hatred, most Torontonians know very little about the riot itself.

In 2020, immersive theatre company **The Hogtown Collective** created a radio-drama version of **THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT** as a podcast, since Covid health restrictions prevented us from working together in person. Producers **Sam Rosenthal** and **Drew Carnwath** partnered with Canadian opera superstar **Measha Brueggergosman-Lee**, who created an original score and served as Musical Director for the production. We felt it was an important story to tell for several reasons: first, to bring “the riot” to audiences who had never heard of the event. Second, we felt the story would resonate with *all* Canadians, not just the Jewish and Italian communities: Canada is a country of immigrants, and historically Toronto has been the main hub of immigrant activity. Finally, **THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT** is based on producer Sam Rosenthal’s family story – specifically, his grandfather and namesake Shmuel Rosenthal, who owned a drugstore mere blocks from Christie Pits itself when the riot broke out. There is a deep personal connection that grounds our story in emotional and dramatic truth.

In 2023 **The Hogtown Collective** partnered with the TDSB and the UJA to create a fully realized, live theatre version of **THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT**, staged right in the park, for students across the GTA. Working entirely with professional actors (twelve in total), designers and stage crew, we brought this ambitious project to life **for over five thousand Toronto-area schoolkids**. The response from the students and teachers has been overwhelming: the show sold out quickly, with many schools calling to get on a wait list. Clearly there is massive interest for the show, and that extends beyond the ‘school’ version: we have been inundated with requests from organizations and community groups, as well as individual theatre-goers for a public performance. Finally, the news outlets and other media flocked to our story, and we went from local news to national news in less than a week: CBC, Global TV, CTV, City TV and the Toronto Star all ran feature stories on our play, and impact it is having on student audiences.

**Next steps** We feel that **THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT** will (and should!) continue its journey, to reach as large an audience as possible. We have a ‘rain day’ version of the show that proves we can travel across the country on tour – indoors or outdoors. Currently, we are already in talks with the TDSB about next year, as the school board is very eager to bring us back in 2024 and beyond. For the **90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** this August 16, we feel the show would make an invaluable contribution to the events taking place, and it would allow audiences of all ages to experience first-hand what took place in “Toronto the Good.” Our show is an important reminder for *all* citizens about the impact of race-based hatred, a reminder that, sadly, we need today more than ever. **THE CHRISTIE PITS RIOT** is ultimately a show that is filled with hope and resilience, and offers an exciting portrait of a community – and individuals – who finally stood up to hate and said, “no more.”

### **MEDIA LINKS**

**CBC Television News – The National** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXoKvpcp0Lk>

**The Toronto Star (Front page)**

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2023/05/19/bigotry-antisemitism-bloodshed-a-shameful-chapter-of-torontos-history-plays-out-in-a-city-park.html?rf>

**GLOBAL TV - National**

<https://globalnews.ca/video/9716189/play-educating-kids-teens-about-1933-christie-pits-riot-in-toronto/>

**CITY TV News** <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/05/18/toronto-christie-pits-riots-production/>

**CTV News** <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/video?binId=1.3378531>