

CANADIAN ACTOR HAPPY TO STAR IN NEW CBC SERIES

By *Sheri Shefa, Staff Reporter* - September 28, 2016 👁 2204 💬 0



Having forged a decades-long career that includes roles in countless movies, television shows and theatre productions, Winnipeg-native Ari Cohen is no stranger to playing complicated characters.

But Cohen, who made his big screen debut in Guy Maddin's 1991 cult classic, *Archangel*, which was set in northern Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 said he's excited about his latest role as a smart, ambitious playboy who is on a trajectory that could land him the role of Canada's prime minister.

"Sam Charles is the attorney general of Ontario who is being groomed to be the next prime minister," said Cohen, who is part of the cast of CBC's eight-part series, *Shoot the Messenger*, which will begin airing on Oct. 10.

"He's kind of a playboy, very smart. He's a Rhodes scholar. I don't want to say he was modelled on Justin Trudeau, but certainly he was one of the inspirations... He's kind of, in some ways, a composite of Justin, [but] there are elements of Bill Clinton in there," he said, adding that the show's creators, Sudz Sutherland and Jennifer Holness, were also inspired by U.S. President Barack Obama.

"Not unlike many politicians, he does become embroiled in some scandal. They have also taken inspiration from the whole Rob Ford saga – there is a mysterious video that people are trying to get their hands on."

Shoot the Messenger is "a murder-mystery political drama" that opens with a young newspaper reporter who is offered "something big" by one of her anonymous sources. On her way to meet with her source, she witnesses a murder and becomes part of the story.

"It's set in Toronto, in the present, and it really is a sweeping storyline that encompasses the Somali gangs in Dixon City," an area in Etobicoke where the Dixon City Bloods originated.

"The tentacles of the story branch off to elements of big business in the sporting world and the political class. That is the part of the story that my character is focused on."

Cohen, who has more than 50 TV roles under his belt, including recurring roles on the *L Word* and *Smallville*, said the seeds of his acting career were sown when he was a teenager after he was involved in some high school musicals.

He was a theatre student at the University of Manitoba when he began landing acting gigs.

"I had been considering a career as an actor, but it was more that first year at the University of Manitoba that was really instrumental in my development. I got two breaks while I was still studying and it emerged as a potential career."

Cohen said despite being raised in a Conservative Jewish household, having spent his grade school years in Winnipeg's Jewish day school system and spending a year in Israel after high school as part of the Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad program, his parents supported his unconventional dream.

"My parents were always very supportive. My dad had done some acting in university as well, so they were pretty relieved that I had found something I had a passion for and that the potential for work seemed to be there," Cohen said.

He said his favourite characters to play are those who are flawed, smart and funny.

"You're always looking to find shades where a character is neither good or bad, but just human... I have another show called *Gangland Undercover*, and in that, I play an undercover cop who is involved in the infiltration of biker gangs. What excites me is contrast, so to be able to go from a sort of well-put-together, very powerful politician, to a guy who is kind of an undercover cop in the trenches, I've been lucky the last few years in particular to have that contrast," he said.

"The last thing I did was play a rabbi in a Stephen King movie, *It*. It's shooting right now. It's really very much a cameo. He's the father of one of the kids, but it was fun to play a rabbi."

While he's grateful to have worked in the industry internationally, Cohen said he's happy to be part of a Canadian production.

"It's nice to be a part of something that is in Canada, is set in Canada, for Canada. The CBC really gave the filmmakers a lot of latitude to make the show they wanted to make and it is a pretty exciting show, so I'm looking forward to that launching. Hopefully, if it's well received, we'll go back and do more."