

## The Bowie Lives at the Village Playhouse



By Nate Smelle

This Saturday evening at the Bancroft Village Playhouse fans of the rock icon David Bowie are in for a special treat. At 7 p.m. on Sept. 7 the music of the legendary artist will come to life as the award winning vocalist and songwriter Michael Bell brings The Bowie Lives to the Bancroft Village Playhouse stage. Deemed "Canada's most spectacular tribute to David Bowie", The Bowie Lives features Bell on vocals, accompanied by an all star band; including local performers guitarist Aimee O'Connor of the Coe Hill Girls, and vocalist Isabella Dupuis starring as Annie Lennox. The show also features a multi-media display, as well as a theatrical performance with costumes. In anticipation of the sold out show at the Playhouse this Saturday, Bancroft This Week recently spoke with Bell to find out more about what the audience can expect. Bell said he first discovered Bowie's music at the age of 14, after he purchased the Young Americans album for his aunt as a Christmas present. Listening to a lot of Motown music at the time, he quickly becoming enamoured with Bowie's vocals and style of rhythm and blues. Wanting to hear more, Bell said he began digging into Bowie's massive back catalogue. From that point one, he was hooked. "I've always been a fan of big vocalists," Bell told Bancroft This Week. "When I was kid, I was cutting my teeth, listening and singing to Queen, and Roxy Music, and Sparks, and of course Bowie. I grew up listening to Sinatra and all the big vocalists, but Bowie had such a great voice and such a range." Though early on in his career, Bell mostly performed his own music, he said no matter what band he was playing with he would often introduce a couple Bowie covers as part of their set. After busking his way across the country in the early '80s, Bell returned to Toronto and formed the pop group EyeEye; which went on to win the Q107 Homegrown Contest in 1984. It was at this time, Bell staged a theatrical musical tribute to Bowie, he called, "Changes All Bowie." Bell stopped touring in the early '90s after meeting his wife and deciding to focus on raising a family. During this time he continued to be involved with the music scene as the founder/publisher of an entertainment newspaper in central and eastern Ontario called The Wire MEGazine. When he eventually decided to sell the magazine nearly 30 years later, he went back out on the road, performing bootlegs of Frank Sinatra in Toronto's jazz clubs. Following David Bowie's untimely passing on Jan. 10, 2016, Bell along with his musical director Michael Beauclerc wanted to come up with a way to honour the man who helped shape his life and career in music. When they first came up with the idea of a new tribute show, Bell said he was unsure whether they could create a show that lived up to the monumental legacy Bowie left behind. Acknowledging the depth of Bowie's music catalogue and the diversity of genres he experimented with throughout his career, he said, "You really need a great set of chops to play Bowie." Once they began auditioning musicians for the show, Bell said he realized the band they were assembling had what it takes to honour Bowie's life's work. While most Bowie tribute acts tend to focus on one period of Bowie's career, Bell said what makes The Bowie Lives so unique is that in the show they perform everything "from "Space Oddity" to "Lazarus", and everything in between." When asked what it is that has always drawn him to David Bowie's music and artistry, Bell said it was "a number of things." While Bowie's larger than life vocals have always been the main attraction

for him, as a self-proclaimed 'showy dude', Bell said, 'I was always kind of attracted to the 'Glam thing', and here was the ultimate 'Glam' artist? Later on in my career I really appreciated the fact that there were so many different genres of music. Myself, I've always loved every kind of music and listened to every kind of music; so here was a guy giving me the opportunity to sing everything from rock to pop to 'Glam' to 'R and B' to on and on and on.' As a way for fans to honour Bowie, Bell encourages the audience to dress up in their favourite 'Bowie-style' costume. Adding to the excitement that evening, The Bowie Lives also features a pre-show, he calls the 'Bowie Bazaar.' During the bazaar, fans can pick up David Bowie T-shirts, collectibles, LP's and DVDs and more. For more information on Michael Bell and The Bowie Lives, as well as a schedule of upcoming shows, visit: [www.thebowielives.com/](http://www.thebowielives.com/)