



A FUNDRAISER

FOR WESTERN GOLD THEATRE & WEST END SENIORS' NETWORK



TOMATOES TRIED TO KILL ME BUT BANJOS SAVED MY LIFE



A TRUE STORY

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY KEITH ALESSI

JUNE 11-14, 2026

We gratefully acknowledge that we are on the traditional and unceded territories of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tseil-waututh) First Nations. We deeply thank them for so generously allowing us to live, work, and play on their beautiful lands.

*Creativity has no Expiry Date!*TM

A MESSAGE FROM TANJA DIXON-WARREN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Every so often an extraordinarily beautiful gift falls from the sky. Keith Alessi is one such a gift – wrapped up in joy, music and a boat-load of generosity. To top it off, he tells a great story and plays a mean toe tappin’ banjo!

Being creative, for some intangible and ethereal reason that I can’t quite put my finger on, changes lives and makes us feel better. It buoys us. It helps us see the world in a different way. It opens our hearts and makes us generous. When a person discovers the artist in themselves after going through something life changing – and they use this artistry for good; it is beyond inspiring.

Keith’s journey with his dear friend the banjo is a testament to this; the healing power of music, performance, laughter and giving back. The fact that Keith has chosen to share his story to raise funds for organizations around the world is nothing short of jaw dropping and very humbling.

As a small theatre company, with a unique mandate and very limited government funding, we rely on ticket sales, donations, concession, and fundraising events for 80% of our budget. Times are particularly tight right now and I am so grateful Keith is offering this gift to our wee company and our West End/Coal Harbour community.

Sincere, heartfelt thanks to Keith and Erika – and thanks to all of you for being here and supporting the work we do. Sit back and enjoy a “joke tellin’, banjo playin’, heart healin’ experience”!

DIRECTOR’S NOTE FROM ERIKA CONWAY

Keith’s story is as important as it is compelling and a meaningful lesson for all of us.

Our stories change us, challenge us, and define us. There is healing in speaking out the truth. Life can throw us obstacles but, if we choose to look at it through a different lens, they can be the gifts to steer us back to ourselves and our souls.

This has been the heartbeat of the show and the magic I have attempted to capture and draw out in the sharing of his personal story.

Keith is an entertaining and dynamic storyteller but it’s his bravery, authenticity and vulnerability on stage that holds the real power to this piece. We have purposefully constructed it in a way that allows him to engage you in the journey, disarm you with music and humour and then pull at your heartstrings.

It has been an absolute privilege to be a part of bringing this incredible story to the stage and it is my hope that it will cause you to reflect on your own journey, wake you up to listen to that nudge inside of you and unlock the passions that have been tucked away.

TOMATOES TRIED TO KILL ME BUT BANJOS SAVE MY LIFE

Running Time:

Approximately 95 minutes including one 15 minute intermission.

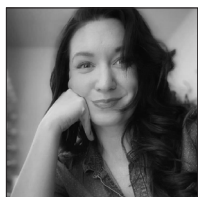
'SET A SPELL AND RIFF' with Keith and Erika.

Stay for a Chin-Wag (aka Talk-With) after the performance.

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM BIOS



Keith Alessi - Writer/ Performer Keith Alessi is a writer and performer who has had multiple successful careers including a public company CEO, entrepreneur, and college professor, leading organizations in both Canada and the United States. A dual Canadian–American citizen, Keith is a Certified Public Accountant and holds an MBA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His professional background is grounded in leadership, resilience, and real-world experience. Keith now channels his creativity into performance, using his story to explore identity, adversity, and the human capacity for transformation. When he is not on tour he is practicing his banjo at home splitting his time between Meadows of Dan, Virginia and Naples, Florida.



Erika Conway - Director/ Producer/ Dramaturg Erika Conway is a Canadian actress, writer, director, and creative collaborator with over 35 years in the performing arts across theatre, film, and television. Her passion lies in working with people to unlock their innate creativity, personal stories, and authentic voice. Her work is grounded in a belief in the healing power of storytelling, community connection, and art that gives back. Erika is the director and producer of the internationally-touring solo show *Tomatoes Tried to Kill Me But Banjos Saved My Life*, which has toured across Canada, the United States, the UK, and Australia. She has been privileged to collaborate on the show since its inception in 2018, and it remains one of the highlights of her career. When not touring, Erika develops workshops and creative programs supporting others in finding their voice, reclaiming creativity, and coming home to themselves through story.

Tomatoes Tried to Kill Me But Banjos Saved My Life isn't just a show, it's a cause.

A heartfelt passion project that began as a nudge after Keith Alessi's life took a major turn, it has been his mission to raise money for causes close to his heart. Through donations, including 100% of all artist fees, the show has raised over \$1.3 million as of March 2026 for various cancer, community, music, and theatre charities.

Keith is generously supporting Western Gold Theatre's Creative Accessibility Program and the West End Seniors' Network.

Special Thanks to: Lighting Designer - Colleen Bayati, Michael Fera, Seamus Fera, Carole Frisk, Glenn MacDonald, Claudine Matlo, Tory Ross, staff of WESN, volunteers of both organizations, West End Journal.

WESTERN GOLD THEATRE'S CREATIVE ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAM:

We believe all older adults can and should participate in the arts - and not just any arts, but high-quality, innovative, and contemporary arts that engage them fully and reflect the lives they lead.

It is no secret that challenges come with aging, including physical mobility, stamina, memory loss, cultural displacement and the inherent emotional barriers that result. Instead of hiding the normal experiences of the life process, we shine a light on them and make them integral to creation, design, rehearsal, and performance processes. We identify challenges and find opportunities and solutions. The questions we ask are:

- What are the barriers?
- How do we fully support senior artists on stage/in rehearsal?
- Are there commonly used accessibility tools we can apply to theatrical creation?
- How do we bring practices such as viewpoints, Laban (a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting human movement) or biomechanics to senior artists?
- What new technologies and digital media can be used to support our artists and audiences?
- How can we ensure cultural comfort?
- How can we aesthetically illuminate the experience of seniors' day to day living?

The result is what you will see on our stage: An artistic form suited to senior artists; one which also reflects the experience of our audience. It embraces adaptability and, at heart, celebrates the notion that life experience fully informs artistic practice.



WEST END SENIORS' NETWORK: WESN provides a comprehensive range of support services, fostering community engagement, and promoting well-being through social activities, health programs, and personalized assistance for our cherished elders including Better at Home, Social Meals, Housing Navigation and Peer support amongst others. WESN operates from three different locations: Barclay Manor, the hub for onsite programming, events, and community services; Clothes and Collectibles, a thrift boutique in Denman Place Mall; and Kay's Place, an Information and Referral centre also in Denman Place Mall. Currently, there are over 1,000 members of the Network, 22 paid staff members and more than 300 active volunteers who contribute over 21,200 hours a year to deliver these essential services.

OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT WESTERN GOLD & the WEST END SENIORS' NETWORK

Connect with Joy-Anna Leggasee, our Head Hog of Fundraising! Yes, she's a piggy bank, and she can be found in the theatre lobby. She is always hungry and very appreciative! She will dine on cash, cheque or credit and debit cards.

Purchase a 50/50 ticket!

Donate directly to Western Gold on our website WESTERNGOLDTHEATRE.ORG

Donate directly to WESN on their website WESN.CA

BECOME A MEMBER! VOLUNTEER! SEE A SHOW!