

## THE PHILANTHROPIST

A PERSON WHO SEEKS TO PROMOTE THE WELFARE OF OTHERS, ESPECIALLY BY THE GENEROUS DONATION OF MONEY TO GOOD CAUSES.

# CHAD BERNSTEIN

## THE MUSIC MAN



BY ANDREA CARNEIRO

## BACKGROUND:

A renowned musician and teacher, Bernstein has spent much of his life drawing inspiration from music, but it was his sense of community that drew him to become a "social entrepreneur." Bernstein says growing up in a family that didn't hide the challenges of the world around him helped him and his brother Max (a Marine) understand their good fortune. "We were always encouraged to be open-minded, to treat all people with respect and empathy, and to enrich our lives by sharing with others, be that experiences, conversation, a meal, or something we have that others may not," he says of his parents. "Being fortunate enough to have been brought up in a safe neighborhood with a loving, supportive family was not lost on us, and I think that it created a sense of responsibility for us both to give back or pay that forward."



Guitars over Guns Recording Sessions at Noisematch Recording Studios

## ABOUT GUNS OVER GUITARS ORGANIZATION (GOGO)

Bernstein first created GOGO as an informal volunteer music mentoring program, aiming to work with youth from underserved areas in Miami, but soon saw its potential, formalizing the program and launching at North Miami Middle School in 2008. The idea was born out of a performance Bernstein did with local band Suénalo at a juvenile detention center. "They were a rowdy group and we were unable to reach them through conversation, but when we started playing they were entranced. Our music had elements of funk, salsa, pop, and rock, and when our MC started rapping the kids were hooked," he says. After using one audience member's outburst as a catalyst for a song, "the kids were transfixed and there was an amazing exchange that took place ... It was magical and completely elevated us all." The lightbulb went off for Bernstein. "It was at that point that I realized what kind of unique power music has in connecting us with these youth." Today, GOGO boasts programs in seven schools and various community centers throughout Miami and Chicago.

## THE DETAILS

GOGO relies on the support of not only professional musicians, but community members as well. "We are currently offering donation opportunities that include sponsoring a student, sponsoring a mentor (who will work with 5-10 youth), and even sponsoring school sites," says Bernstein. "Setting up a monthly donation is one of the best ways to support - our sustainers are the lifeblood of the organization and allow us to keep the programs running. We also accept used musical instruments (guitars, basses, keyboards, drum sets, and sound/production gear)." Beyond financial donations, Bernstein says the musicians who participate are able to channel their own passion into what he calls "a powerful catalyst for change." Adds Bernstein, "It is truly life-changing and most of our mentors will tell you that they are affected as much as the students by the program."

## THE FUTURE

Bernstein hopes to continue the organization's growth and is eyeing expansion to New York and Los Angeles in the coming years. For now, he's concentrating on the 600 students in Miami and Chicago who look to him and his team of passionate musicians to help them navigate oftentimes difficult situations. With the first classes of middle school students now entering college, GOGO is also rolling out GOGO Rise, a mentor program that connects community members with students to continue their mentorship through high school. "In 10 years, I would like to see the program's reach extend nationwide and start to connect youth internationally through the universal language of music. A shared vision of empowering youth to be future leaders through unlocking their creative potential would change the world."

"We believe that all young people should have the opportunity to reach their full potential through the transformation nature of music and the power of mentorship. That belief should be shared amongst our most challenged cities and spread deeply."