



Photo: Joel Goulder

Photo: William Aura



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Change the World Through Music

BY CHERIE YURCO

■ About six years ago, Dave Bacon, 38, of Denver, Colorado, became involved in a project that changed his life, and the lives of countless musicians and future musicians around the world. It all started when his friend, Greg Johnson, asked if he was interested in becoming involved in a film that his brother Mark was making.

“Greg knew that my family was very musical, and thought that I might be interested in helping to finance the film *Playing for Change, Peace Through Music*,” explains Bacon, whose father is a Pulitzer Prize winning composer and pianist, and whose mother is a gifted soprano and music teacher.

Bacon became one of three executive producers of the film conceived by Mark Johnson. Johnson was working for a New York

record label when he realized, during his daily commute, that it was the music on the street and in the subways that inspired him the most, and that best captured musical innovation and passion—more so than any of the bands on their label.

“He had this idea of capturing the soul of the street musicians, many of whom played the streets, not just for money, but for the mutual inspiration that playing music in the moment provided,” says Bacon.

Though not one of the filmmakers, Bacon explains they set out to capture epic, oftentimes spontaneous performances when not just the musician, but passive and active listeners are engaged in harmony with each other. “In short, the goal was to ‘connect the world through music,’ by showing that music, in many respects, is the heartbeat of the human race and earth itself; where race, religions, borders, and other conflicts divide us, music unites us,” he adds.



Photo: William Aura



Photo: Francois Voule

The filmmakers sought out musicians who represented change—those whose lyrics or melodies portrayed hardship or revelry, or told a story of overcoming adversity. In the end, they recorded musicians and built songs as they traveled around the world, eventually connecting them to record the same song, together.

In the course of making the film, the nonprofit Playing for Change Foundation (playingforchange.org) was established to bring music education, instruments, and facilities to areas of the world that most need music’s inspiration and hope, especially for young people. Today, Bacon is an active board member for the foundation.

Bacon feels fortunate to be involved in Playing for Change. “This work is an outlet for me,” he explains. “I personally feel my vocation is to somehow bring out the best in everyone, and doing so brings out the best in me. Everyone engaged in Playing for Change—the students, the millions of listeners, and anyone exposed to it, even in the littlest ways—is left with a positive feeling about music and our planet. It’s extraordinary to be part of that.”

The foundation continues to build music programs around the world, while sustaining the ones it has already founded. “Our organization has to be sure not to take on too much,” says Bacon. “Sustaining the schools is a tremendous task and requires constant fundraising.”

The foundation’s big annual fundraiser is Playing for Change Day (playingforchangeday.org), a day of action in September when musicians around the world give performances to raise funds. Last year there were 225 events held in 41 countries. Musicians interested in performing in this year’s event can find out more information and sign up on the website.

“Playing for Change has exponentially changed my life, and the lives of so many other people,” concludes Bacon. “For me, I think that one of the most powerful things about the movement is the simplicity of an idea based on a tiny bit of inspiration. Without ambition and collaboration, that idea would have gone nowhere. But it did, and it continues to grow and inspire and has become a sort of massive family; and I feel like I’m just a happy family member, whose family roots started with an idea. That’s something I can apply to my life in so many ways, especially now that I’m a father.”

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