

Issue 42

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MAGAZINE

HIGHLIGHT



BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME



BANDS THAT JAM FOR AFRICA

Morgan Fisher was only 12 years old when she first met Peter Pretorius in a Michigan boardroom, a result of coming to work with her mother for the day. During their meeting, Pretorius told Fisher his horrifying story of being stranded in Mozambique for 10 days without food or water, where he watched thousands of people die daily. When he was finally reunited with his loved ones back home in South Africa, he decided to dedicate his life to helping the people he met during those 10 grueling days.

Enter JAM.

"I was very overwhelmed when I heard this story, but was so inspired by Peter's selflessness and commitment," Fisher said.

But meeting Pretorius and hearing about the creation of his non-profit organization, JAM, is only half of the story. After this eye-opening encounter, Fisher started fundraising wherever and however she could. The majority of her friends were musically talented, so she approached them about playing a benefit show for JAM at the Pike Room in Pontiac, Michigan. The outcome was far better than Fisher could have ever imagined.

"The room flooded until we reached maximum capacity," she remembered. "This is when I knew that it was just the beginning of my journey with JAM!"

Still riding the high from the concert, Fisher pitched the idea of using benefit shows to create a full-time enterprising

organization called Bands that Jam for Africa (BTJ4A) to Pretorius. BTJ4A organizes concerts, sells merchandise, and then gives 100 percent of their proceeds to JAM, which uses this money to feed and educate children in South Africa.

"Our relationship with JAM ensures that proceeds from our shows and merch go directly to the community we aim to help," Fisher said. "Our business model is simple: buy a ticket, enjoy the show, and change a life."

Fisher recently spent some time in Angola with JAM's media team, documenting the stories of villages that have been helped by her effort, and the highlight of her entire career came from this trip. While they were drilling for water, she watched as the community came alive with excitement about this fresh commodity that is so often taken for granted.

"You could truly see the children having more vibrant, joyful energy where JAM was feeding," she said. "It gave us so much inspiration to raise the funds for the villages we are not yet in."

But Fisher admitted that her visit to the malnutrition clinic was the most moving experience from her time in Angola.

"I saw children die before my eyes," Fisher recalled. "My heart broke in ways I didn't know possible."

Since her first meeting with Pretorius, Fisher has had an overwhelming desire to be based in Johannesburg, South Africa, in order to be closer to the cause that she fights for.

"I believe I am at the center of what I was put on this earth to do," she said. "The challenge is to remain in this place."

When asked how she goes about setting up a benefit concert, Fisher answered simply: "It's just like any other gig but with a different spirit."

The non-profit is selective about which artists they chose to work with because it's imperative that the musicians care about the cause as well.

"We want to give musicians the opportunity to be educated on the social issue, not just play a gig and move on to the next city," Fisher commented.

When the band is as invested in the cause as the organization, the show and atmosphere of the event reflect it.

In July, Bands that Jam for Africa put on yet another event: this time on Mandela Day in South Africa. The organization partnered with the country's chart topping artists MonArk, Moses Metro Man and Bouwer Bosch. Fisher is committed to working with more South African-based bands due to her strong belief in JAM's model of 'Helping Africa Help Itself.'

"The African artists understand the poverty and reality in a very tangible way," Fisher explained.

However, as the organization continues to grow, Fisher can't help but get excited about the future, especially the possibility of working with Switchfoot.

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"I have so much respect for the way they carry themselves not only as artists, but also as human beings," she said. "They have a great vision."

She's also open to expanding the organization if she finds someone else whose vision is aligned with that of Bands that Jam for Africa. Fisher believes that platforms like Warped Tour or Take Action, which are also motivated to help others, would make great partners for the organization.

"There is such a history of using music as a mechanism for social change," Fisher said. "I believe those communities hold the power to influence the masses."

Although Bands that Jam for Africa has been around for a few years now, Fisher confesses that this is only the beginning of her journey. As she continues to nourish the organization in South Africa, she'll also be working closely with JAM International to create marketing campaigns, and, of course, there will be plenty more benefit concerts in the future.

"BTJ4A is my passion and creative outlet," Fisher said. "It perfectly marries my heart for Africa and music."

 @BTJ4A  /BandsThatJAMforAfrica

INTERVIEW & WORDS: Alexandra Shimalla