



# Moving Beyond gOD: The Story of WAREHOUSE Shabbat

BY JOSH NELSON , 3/14/2013 3 COMMENTS

PRINT EMAIL SHARE

Tweet 9 G+1 0 Pin It

## RSS

Subscribe to RSS Arts & Culture

Subscribe to RSS Shabbat

Subscribe to RSS Music

Subscribe to RSS Jewish Holidays

Subscribe to RSS Jewish Life



Everything seems simple at 30,000 feet.

I'm on my way to Austin, TX, for South By Southwest (SXSW), one of the most exciting and influential music/film/interactive conferences in the world. Tomorrow night will be the culmination of five years of work, dreams, and struggles; of pushback, scowls, and great joy; of transcendent communal moments, quizzically raised eyebrows and outright looks of disdain. Tomorrow night, we'll share WAREHOUSE Shabbat with the world at large. The Union for Reform Judaism and the ROI Community have generously stood behind this project and formed a unique partnership so that they might support its mission.

If you've not heard of it before, WAREHOUSE is an alternative Shabbat worship experience that's held in a bar. It features a live band playing both liturgical and secular music, spoken word, multimedia, great food, and incredibly cool people. And, it's completely free. Born out of the feelings of disconnection and abandonment that typically come as standard equipment on a late model, 20-something Jew in the city, WAREHOUSE was designed to be a point of access for 20s/30s who felt shut out by the organized Jewish establishment. The story here is actually quite simple. After a disastrous (and unfortunately prototypical) Hebrew school experience and a traumatic life event (the sudden death of a sibling), I had thrown up my hands and given up on gOD.

Yes. gOD. I actually typed it that way for a while. I was very angry.

I was also very lucky. In the midst of my spiritual free fall, I was suddenly caught and guided back to a place of positive connection by Debbie Friedman (z"l).

I was growing - as a man, as an artist, and as a Jew. I needed a spiritual venue that didn't come with emotional baggage, that wasn't laden with expectation or obligation. I needed a

place that could reflect God's light through the lens of a contemporary aesthetic. I needed a place to be. Yet, no matter how hard I looked, I couldn't find the right fit. I didn't even feel comfortable walking into a synagogue, despite the fact that I traveled to nearly forty of them each year.

I designed WAREHOUSE because I needed it to exist for me. Like most of my contemporaries, I was searching for a meaningful Jewish experience that happened on my own terms, for a spiritual practice that met me where I was instead of insisting that I compromise and move away from my center. And, as I shared these ideas with my friends and colleagues, I found that they were searching for the same.

So, we built it.

And they came.

NYC. Washington, DC. Boston. We reached out and started the process of opening a door for a demographic that felt isolated and locked out. And, in what was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever known, these young people responded with stories of newfound spirituality, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of connection.

I acknowledge that I can't get back the time I lost with God. But nonetheless, I've walked back through that door. And tomorrow night, if I can help just one person do the same, I'll know that every step of this journey has been worth it.

Shabbat Shalom.

The poster features the ROI Community logo at the top right, which includes a circular graphic of blue and green dots. Below it, the event title 'WAREHOUSE ATX' is written in large green letters, with 'AN ALTERNATIVE SHABBAT EXPERIENCE' underneath. A central box contains the date 'Friday, March 15' and time '6:00PM // 7:00PM'. Below that, the location 'Takoba's Cantina El Milamores, 1411 E 7th Street' is listed. At the bottom, it says '6:00PM Snacks & Networking // 7:00PM Shabbat Service'. The footer includes production credits: 'Produced by Josh Nelson from jDOES With Support from Union for Reform Judaism' and the Union for Reform Judaism logo.

## About the Author

**Josh Nelson** is one of the most popular performers and producers in modern Jewish music. A multi-instrumentalist and songwriter, Josh's music is celebrated and integrated into the repertoire of congregations, camps and communities around the world. Josh is the music director for the [URJ Biennial convention](#), a faculty member of [Hava Nashira](#), and an artist in residence for the [JCC Maccabi Artsfest](#). Learn more at [www.joshnelsonproject.com](http://www.joshnelsonproject.com).