



Chai Chi, the Branzino Boys & Alex Kislov Purim Party

@ HEADQUARTERS
BEERCADE

By Ina Bochian

Photography Artists Box

**More Than Just A
Party | When
People & Purpose
Connect with
Music & Soul**

Chai Chi is an event planning company started by Josh Horowitz and David Pawlan in 2024 with a focus on curating memorable events for Chicago Jewish young professionals and anyone who likes to party with the best music at unique venues. The Purim party, co-hosted by DJ's Alex Kislov and Branzino Boys, brought out the best looking members of the tribe and their friends to Headquarters Beercade in River North.

Alex Kislov is a Chicago-based producer and DJ with an established reputation in the city's electronic music scene, well known for his enthralling mix of deep house, techno, and innovative beats. With a desire to push limits, Kislov is inspired to craft memorable experiences through his music as he evolves at his craft and continues to make a significant impact on dance music lovers and in the artistically fluid genre of house inspired electronic music.

In 2023, Jewish Chicago Magazine and the Chicago chapter of the Jewish United Fund recognized Alex as one of the 36 Under 36 (Double Chai Under Chai) honorees. Besides creating captivating sounds and building a following as a DJ, this Israeli-Ukrainian American also speaks three languages fluently and two proficiently.

Of his songs, my personal favorites are: Dream Sequence featuring Leo Wood and Time Stops. For more of Alex's music, you can follow him on Spotify.

The Branzino Boys are a DJ duo consisting of Michael (@novakallday) and Swggrbck, managed by producer Josh Horowitz, founder of Diskonect, curating live house and techno events in Chicago, Miami, and beyond. Their most popular remix is Million Dollar Baby with Jungle Blvd. You can follow Michael Novak on Spotify and also listen to Groove Control and other curated playlists.



Producer | DJ Alex Kisov

Photo Credit: Artists Box

Familiar with Headquarters Beercade from an earlier event cohosted by Chicago Jewish Alliance and Masa Israel I attended earlier in the month, where I met Musician and Jewish Activist, Kami Salman who works with Masa, I was already excited about the venue. While CJA had already promoted Chai Chi's event, I had already bought tickets to another Purim party, but once Kami mentioned Masa was also co-sponsoring the party I decided to attend because I had such an amazing time chatting with her at the other event.

Feeling a bit frazzled after attending the Northbrook Public Library solo to silently protest a screening of a movie meant to spread misinformation about Israel, I found myself uncertain about how I would make it to two other locations on Purim. Dressed in a white gown adorned with the Israeli flag and a crown to embody a modern-day Queen Esther, I began to question whether my outfit was the right choice. This ensemble had been a last-minute decision, inspired by a message in our group chat from one of the co-founders of CJA, who had asked if anyone could go to the Northbrook Public Library to take a few photos.

Sure, I could have made a quick drive to the library in my workout clothes and then hurried back to change before the parties, but have you met me? I dress up to go to Target. Besides, I thought it would be much more powerful to silently show my support for the hostages still in Gaza while wearing a gown, a yellow ribbon, and an Israeli flag. As a survivor of sexual violence, I've been deeply affected by the accounts of the released female hostages and the stories from eyewitnesses I've met in person since October 7th.

Furthermore, my friend Jake Marlowe was tragically massacred by Hamas at the Nova Festival, and another friend, Shlomi Ziv, was among the rescued hostages. As a result, I am profoundly dedicated to ensuring that all the hostages are either rescued or returned, as a way to honor Jake's memory.



On Purim at the Northbrook Public Library

Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

At just 26 years old, Jake was one of the first friends I made in the Jewish community on Clubhouse, following Ye West's initial antisemitic remarks—a time when I felt a strong urge to deepen my connection with the Jewish community.

It wasn't until I became more connected through Clubhouse and other social media influencers that I began carving my own path toward in-person connections. I initially met the founders of CJA before the organization even existed, and from there, I gradually built my network of Jewish friends and developed an intimate group of people with whom I feel most comfortable. When one of my core friends needs support, I show up wholeheartedly because that's how we strengthen our tribe.

This Purim, I wanted to take meaningful photos for Danny at the library, and I also aimed to use this opportunity to promote Arielle Turover Cohen's book, "I Am Brave and Unafraid." While the library is a public space that has every right to host a screening, if they wanted to be fair, they would provide equal time and attention to Jewish voices condemning the actions of Hamas on October 7th, as well as those devoted to being "brave and unafraid," like the little boy with the teddy bear in Arielle's book.

As I navigated past a few police cars, I informed the officers that I had no intention of confronting or disturbing anyone; I simply wanted to protest in my own way by standing there in my Queen Esther Purim costume to take pictures. Aside from a few people mistakenly assuming that I had just gotten married at Village Hall, which was right next door, most library patrons left me alone, with a few simply saying, "Congratulations!"

Just as I was getting ready to leave, a few people looked at the Israeli flag with disdain and asked me why I was wearing it. "It's Purim, and I'm dressed as Queen Esther. I'm wearing this in support of the hostages," I replied. One woman, who claimed to be Jewish, didn't know what Purim was but still expressed her animosity toward Israel. "Well, all I care about," I said, "is the safe return of the hostages and ensuring they have a secure place to return to, which is their country, Israel. As far as the rest of the conflict goes, I'm not a war strategist, and I don't have the expertise to weigh in on how this should unfold."



On Purim at the Northbrook Public Library

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As I left Northbrook, I wasn't sure if my little photo shoot had made any difference. However, thoughts of Jake and the women I had met—families of hostages and survivors of sexual violence at the hands of terrorists—motivated me. Chilled by the dropping temperature and weighed down by the triggers of my own CPTSD, I resolved to attend the parties.

I found it amusing that people assumed I had just gotten married, but I'd always envisioned a spontaneous Thursday wedding at City Hall, followed by a celebration at Blind Barber. Meanwhile, the guy I was talking to was about 1,700 miles away, and all I really wanted was to get tacos and ice cream with him sometime. Unfortunately, that night was out of the question since he was out of town. Nevertheless, that white dress seemed to bring me luck and courage, which is why I decided to keep it on for the parties.

Once I arrived at Headquarters Beercade, I felt a surge of excitement as I recognized familiar faces and embraced the comforting atmosphere. The music already had me in a good mood, and running into friends made me laugh even more. Eventually, I bumped into one of the hosts, David, whom I had seen around but had never spoken to in person. Just the week before, I had spotted him at the Illinois Holocaust Museum Humanitarian Awards Dinner and thought he was sitting next to another friend I wanted to greet. As it turned out, he wasn't by my friend, and that same friend had mistaken another blonde for me. David and I shared a laugh over the confusion, and I couldn't help but think that everything leads to something.



At Chai Chi Purim Party — Ina Bochian & David Pawlan

Photo Credit: Ethan Negar

After our somewhat awkward introduction, David asked if he could take a picture of me in my dress, suggesting that I would probably win the costume contest. This surprised me, especially given the string of setbacks I had been experiencing lately. Although I often joke, “All I Do Is Win,” in my DJ Khaled voice, I haven't truly been feeling that way for some time. In fact, I've come to realize that I need to self-affirm and be my own biggest fan; otherwise, I'd be holding my breath, waiting for someone to notice my persistence and consistent work. When I do take the time to celebrate my small accomplishments, some people mistake it for arrogance, failing to recognize the sacrifices I've made to earn the right to acknowledge my own value.

Those who truly see my heart understand me, which is why I cried the next day when I received a text from someone expressing how proud they are of me—acknowledging that it was about time someone noticed my efforts. While that recognition meant the world to me, the person I wanted to impress the most seemed less enthusiastic and almost hostile, responding with annoyance at my recounting of my adventures. In those moments, I've never felt smaller than when I put my heart and soul into trying to impress someone, only to have it completely backfire because they appear blind to my intentions.

Detached and dishonest, I can method act my way out of any uncomfortable emotion, but time has taught me to simply sit with the cognitive dissonance of feeling both celebrated and misunderstood. This experience mirrors what many Jewish people encounter as they navigate between two worlds: assimilating enough to succeed and get by while proudly maintaining their identities. Sometimes, those whose love we long for admire us for who they believe us to be, eagerly sprinting toward us because we don't conform to the ordinary.

As the initial enthusiasm settles, some may become overwhelmed by our light, as its flicker reveals unhealed parts of themselves. This can lead them to project their own doubts onto us. What once enchanted them about us can turn into annoyance or a trigger, causing them to dismiss our ideas and suggestions because they assume our success somehow hinders their progress or that we are in competition. Rather than seeing us as partners or collaborators, they cast us aside, convincing themselves they would prefer someone more ordinary. Sometimes, you don't realize you're "too much" for someone until you notice the palpable air of disdain surrounding you.



Jonah Fialkow Holding Down the Dance Floor—
Chai Chi Purim Party at Headquarters Beercade
Photo Credit: Artists Box

On Purim night, however, I danced and celebrated the holiday with others who also had reasons to rejoice. While I joined in a little, Jonah Fialkow—whom I had met at another Chai Chi event—took to the dance floor like a pro alongside the two hired dancers. This guy seems to be the king of parties, or at least that's the energy he gave off. I couldn't keep up with him, but I thoroughly enjoyed watching him and the lovely dancers. He was truly in his own lane.

Most of the people I connect with do not perceive my light as overshadowing their own. Instead, we cheer each other on and empower one another to grow stronger together. We minimize each other's insecurities rather than highlight them, and we overlook small mistakes and misunderstandings instead of dwelling on them.

By connecting our resources and being attuned to each other's sensibilities, we learn to extend grace, enabling the tribe as a whole to thrive rather than merely survive. After the party, David and I stayed in touch, chatting about our mutual friends and how small the world really is. When I mentioned that I had started my own PR and media business, he offered to help and encouraged me. David's words came at a crucial time, especially given the lack of support I had been experiencing elsewhere.

David and Josh, whom I met at a summer event, both have a business-oriented mindset—straightforward and strategic—while also being supportive of artists. In addition to curating parties featuring incredible musicians, they included a jewelry maker, Elissa Robyn Jewlery, as part of their event. I chatted briefly with Elissa while admiring her collection before bumping into another entrepreneurial friend. From my previous interactions with Josh, it was clear he knows many of the same artists and music producers I do. It seems that this duo's strength lies in their ability to go beyond surface level and foster genuine connections.



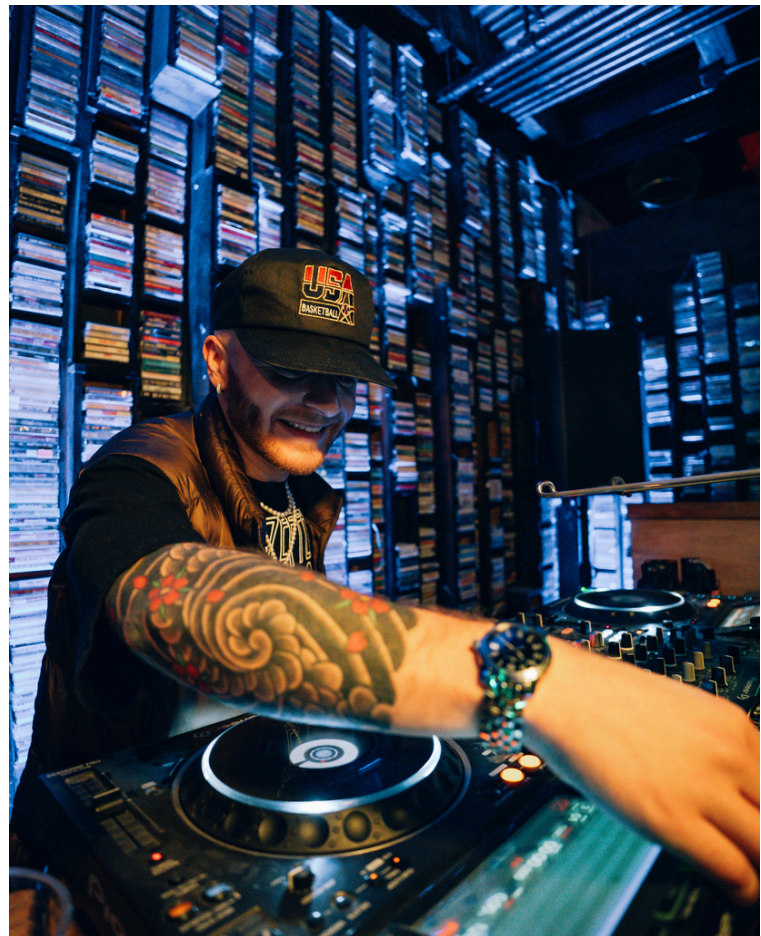
Elissa Robyn Jewlery —
Chai Chi Purim Party at Headquarters Beercade

Photo Credit: Artists Box

My conversation with Josh a few months ago at a 24-hour Mexican place revolved around the themes of experiencing significant losses and emerging stronger and more resilient. We share a common successful friend who faced considerable adversity before his career took off. Both Josh and I met him around the same time when he was still teaching the business of music. During our discussion, he also shared some of his experiences in the art world and offered feedback that I found valuable. At that time, I still had a steady income, but now that I am freelancing, I'm eager to incorporate some of his suggestions.

The crippling fear of embarking on a new quest can be paralyzing, but we can alleviate that anxiety by training our minds to recognize our own greatness. When I remind myself of how incredible I am and share my vision with those I care about, I articulate those thoughts aloud or in writing so that I can hear them and start to believe them myself. This isn't boasting; it's an acting technique that helps performers prepare to embody the characters they portray. Initially, I may not fully believe what I'm saying, but just like manifestation, speaking leads to believing, and believing ultimately leads to action.

After encountering so many obstacles, it was such a relief to show up at the party and unexpectedly win first place in a contest I hadn't even known was happening. More often than not, I dive headfirst into endeavors expecting to win, conquer, or achieve, only to end up falling flat on my face. So when you see someone succeeding or enjoying a moment of victory, know that they are likely facing defeats on about a hundred other days. But they keep getting up and trying. It is this attitude that celebrates life, which is precisely what "CHAI" means—"life." To that, I say, let's figuratively toast to the next party and the next win. L'Chaim, to life!



Michael Novak ½ Branzino Boys
Chai Chi Purim Party at Headquarters Beercade
Photo Credit: Artists Box



Michael Novak ½ Branzino
Boys & Alex Kislov
Chai Chi Purim Party at
Headquarters Beercade
Photo Credit: Artists Box



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Michael Novak ½ Branzino Boys
Chai Chi Purim Party at Headquarters Beercade



Photo Credit: Artists Box



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Purim Party



Photo Credit: Artists Box



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Photo Credit: Artists Box



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Quitting



Don't grow up it's a trap



Photo Credit: Ina Bochian