

Music Mogul Emilio Estefan on Secrets to Business and Marriage



Artwork: Carlos Betancourt. Re-Collections XVI, Azul, 2011

Photography by Romain Maurice

Grooming by Gianna Sparacino

Shot on location at Estefan Kitchen

Timepieces: Hublot

[Emilio Estefan](#) is so approachable, friendly and disarming that it's easy to forget that he is an international music hitmaker, movie producer, Broadway sensation, author, restaurateur, hotelier and 19-time Grammy winner. Over the course of his legendary music career, he has guided Gloria Estefan, Jon Secada, Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira and Ricky Martin to superstardom. Estefan has been involved with iconic movies like *Top Gun* (with the song "Hot Summer Nights"), *Evita*, *The Birdcage*, *Three Men and a Baby* and *Miami Vice*. Most recently, he produced the film *A Change of Heart*, starring Jim Belushi, Virginia Madsen and Gloria, which was directed by Kenny Ortega. And his and Gloria's autobiographical Broadway show, *On Your Feet!*, is smashing records in New York. Since the Cuban-born Estefan runs his multifaceted empire from Miami, *On Your Feet!* will debut its national tour at the Adrienne Arsht Center from October 5-15.

You'll often find him hanging out at Estefan Kitchen, the eponymous Cuban restaurant he and [Gloria](#) just opened in the [Design District](#). And despite all of this fame and fortune (he and Gloria are worth an estimated \$600 million) he's always working and striving to break more barriers for Latinos. One gets the sense that he's relishing the achievements of his two children, filmmaker Nayib, who has blessed him with a grandson, and Emily, who is topping the charts with her innate musical talent and social-media leverage.

Your latest movie, *A Change of Heart*, premiered at the Miami Film Festival. The movie's message seems very topical for today's climate in America.

The movie is all about the differences we have. It's a great message for today. I understand how racism works. It happened in my music career many years ago. People told me to change my last name. People told me to go back to my country. I said, "I don't want to go back to my country. I belong here. This is my home." Why should I change my last name? Diversity is what makes this country incredible. Of course we have to go by the law, but Gloria and I always want to make a contribution to this country that we love. We are so grateful that we were allowed to come here legally and that our children were born here.

You made sure the movie was filmed in Florida. Why was that so important for you?

I've always done everything locally. Even many years ago, when I directed and produced commercials for AT&T and Pepsi, I felt that it was important to use Miami talent. We have so many talented people in Miami. Look at *Moonlight*, which just won an Oscar and was shot in Miami. And I hope we can work to bring back the tax incentives, because many of these productions are going away to places like Nashville and Canada. When you do a movie, or even a commercial, you help all the restaurants, hotels, taxi drivers. These productions come for six weeks, three months, and they generate a lot of money for the city. Whatever I do, I always want to do it here in Miami.



Tile mural artwork: Aaron Kirsch

There's so much pride in Miami's film community because of *Moonlight*.

I am very proud of *Moonlight*. I think it's great to send that kind of message into the

world. It was shot beautifully and brings the flavor of Miami.

The national tour for your hit Broadway musical, *On Your Feet!*, is starting in Miami in October. What can Miamians expect?

We wanted the national tour to start in Miami because it's a Miami story. Everyone in Miami helped us to make our dreams come true. It's a play about the American dream and minorities. As much as people dance, a lot of people cry, too, because it's about the pain when you leave your family. This is the first time that a Broadway show has a 99 percent Latino cast. They told me we would close in a week. Since it opened, *On Your Feet!* has had over 500 performances and is selling tickets through 2018. We brought Latino music to Broadway. But you don't have to be Latino to relate. Sixty, 70 percent of the audience isn't Latino. We get a very big international audience. Of course, they know Gloria. And the tour is going all over the world: Germany, Russia, Holland, Spain, Italy, Japan. We saw the rehearsals the other day in Holland and people went crazy with the Latino music. It will be very weird to see a Cuban Emilio talking in Dutch!

The music industry has changed so much. Is it still profitable? Do you have to look to other profit centers?

When I was the president of Sony I realized that with blank CDs, you'll be able to download music without paying printing or publishing, and I knew that would change the music industry. We've always diversified. I don't want my kids to go through what I had to. The music industry definitely has changed. People don't make the type of money they used to. Social media has become an engine to become successful. I see that with Emily now. Without going on the radio, Emily has reached the charts in four different countries. With social media, you can go worldwide instantaneously. Millions of people can listen to your music.

How social-media savvy are you? Do you tweet yourself?

I can do a little bit. I write about things that are important to me, like my family, and things I want to share with people. They want to know what's going on with you. They want to celebrate with you. It's important to share a bit of your life, but I don't overdo it.

Speaking of Emily, are you guiding her career?

No, she's doing it herself. She knows more than me. I'm so proud of her. She's doing the writing, singing, production. While I love music and have won 19 Grammys, she has

one thing I didn't have: She was fortunate enough to be educated. She went to Berklee College of Music. I never learned music because I didn't have money to go to school. She's so educated when it comes to recording and writing. Of course, she'll always have our advice and we will always try to protect her. But she does everything by herself.

What are her next steps?

She recently performed in Texas, New Orleans and New York. She's doing it the right way. She's getting real fans because her talent is in performing live. She's getting incredible reviews for her live performances. You can't fake that. It's gratifying that people see what I see, because I know she's a good musician.



In 2015, Emilio and Gloria received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Obama

Photo Credit: Estefan Enterprises

In 2015, you and Gloria received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Obama. What was that moment like?

That was the one time I wish you could rewind life for my mom and my dad to be alive. They were my biggest supporters. They told me to be proud of who I am. I am proud that I didn't have to change my last name, I didn't have to change my sound and I didn't

have to leave Miami to become successful worldwide. I have worked with Jon Secada, Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira and Ricky Martin, to name a few, and every single Latin artist I have produced has been in the top-tier in the world. And, of course, Gloria. I want my life to be an inspiration for other people. This award proves that you don't have to change who you are to be successful.

Why is Miami so important to you?

Miami is home. I left Cuba because it was a communist country. I came to Miami and have watched the city develop and grow. Since the beginning, people in Miami have been extremely nice to us. We used to play weddings and bar mitzvahs. Miami is part of my big family, and I'm proud to be part of Miami's history.

You are a grandfather now. What's that like?

That's a blessing. That kid is so funny. He speaks Italian, French, English and Spanish. And when I speak to him in Spanish, he says "Abuelo, you're talking to me in Cuban." Having a grandson, you start seeing life in a different way. You know that time is running out, so you really want to share life with him and the rest of the people that you love in a positive way, with a lot of love. It's a great feeling to be alive.

What is a secret to your success?

The secret is to be surrounded by qualified people who take the same pride that you do. We have almost 2,000 employees, some of who have been with us for 35 years. I've been very lucky to have great people around me.

Which charities do you support?

The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis is one of our favorites. It has been 27 years since Gloria had her accident, and they told me she would never walk again. We were so blessed that she was able to have her life, to be able to walk, to be able to have another child. The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis does such a great job. We know how difficult it is. I remember the first night Gloria dressed herself and brushed her teeth, and it was a celebration! We take life for granted. I wish people would enjoy life more. There would be less hate and negativity. That's the secret in my life: I'm always happy and positive. I always try to make the best that I can.

After 39 years of marriage, how do you keep your romance fresh with Gloria?

When you get married, you should get married for the right reason—because you feel

that power. And in time the love gets bigger, especially when you have kids and grandkids. I've been blessed to marry the woman that I love. We have a beautiful marriage with a lot of respect and communication. The secret is that when you make the other person happy, you're always going to be happy because great things will happen to you.

