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Noor's Dynamic Sounds Fill Paseo Colorado

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The Outlook

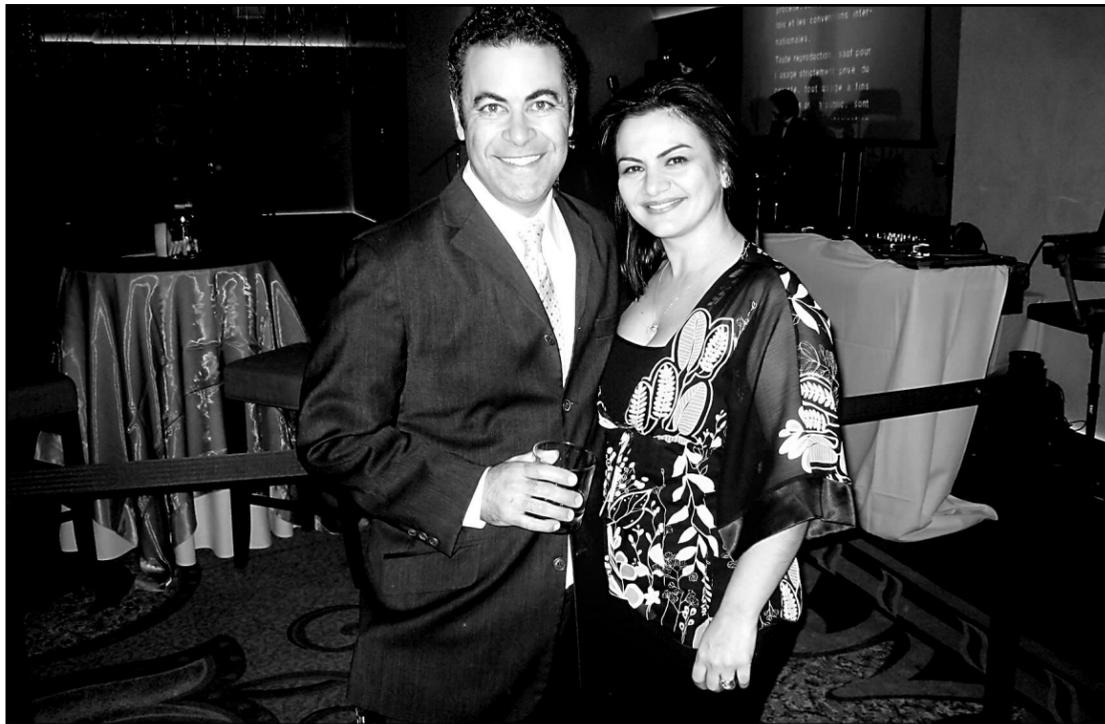
When discussing Noor's Mediterranean cuisine, the restaurant's general manager, Robert Shahnazarian Jr., compares the progression of Noor's unique menu to his favorite rock bands. After all, Noor has become one of the best places in Pasadena to hear a dynamic blend of live music, thanks to its evolutionary nature.

"My favorite artists evolve and change. They don't mess with their core, but they innovate around it," Shahnazarian said. "When you hear U2, The Beatles and Radiohead, you still know it's them but they know how to play around everything else. We at Noor aim to keep evolving and changing, too."

The latest development at Paseo Colorado's only banquet and function hall is live music, spanning many genres Tuesday through Friday evenings for bar patrons. Beginning with 1980s pop band Token Cover Act rocking on Tuesdays and the Dave Lewis Group playing soulful jazz on Wednesdays, Noor's music scene is already making noise in the busy Paseo Colorado bar scene.

Noor's bar and lounge area is cozy, with couches and chairs perfect for groups and couples who want to comfortably enjoy quality drinks and good music. Noor never charges patrons to hear the music, and the expansive lounge area has good acoustics that the musicians appreciate.

Also, the bar has a family feel to it, as many members of the Shahnazarian clan work at Noor and Shahnazarian floats around the lounge, stopping by tables to discuss



Noor owner Robert Shahnazarian Jr. and his wife, Maggie

the food, cocktails and, of course, music.

While the sounds of pop music and jazz fill Noor's bar during the middle of the week, it will soon feature culturally-diverse music from around the world, and on Fridays it will feature a live D.J.

Noor is also in negotiations with a 2008 Grammy Award-nominee to perform a weekly show, although Shahnazarian will not reveal the identity of the act until the deal is complete.

Any band wishing to take up residency on one of Noor's music nights will have to impress Shahnazarian, who spent 15 years as an in-house producer for Sony

Connect. Shahnazarian produced more than 350 sessions with artists such as John Legend, Taylor Swift, David Crosby and Graham Nash, Kelly Clarkson, Incubus and The Killers.

"We will have compelling entertainment and this is a place to hear good music," Shahnazarian said. "And I'm pretty good at selecting talent."

On Wednesdays evenings from 8-11 p.m., people in Paseo Colorado's courtyard can follow the silky sounds of jazz all the way to Noor.

Jamming in front of a projector screen showing Ken Burns' documentary "Jazz," the Dave Lewis Group features Jamey Arent on gui-

tar, Mike Greenwood on keyboards, Jayme David on bass guitar and Lewis on drums. The band plays a smooth yet powerful style of jazz, filling the room with sound without drowning out guests' conversations.

"It's a cool hip vibe and an eclectic crowd," Lewis said. "We play a lot of favorites and then we let it loose by the end of the night."

The inventive and improvisational nature of jazz fits in with Shahnazarian's vision of a flexible venue that hosts guests looking for something different.

"Jazz is the sound of surprise," Shahnazarian said. "You just let the music take you where it's going to go."

It's fitting that Shahnazarian would appreciate and implement jazz into Noor. After all, the building formerly housed the Pasadena Jazz Institute before Shahnazarian bought it in 2009 and opened Noor last November. Noor has become one of the top banquet halls in Pasadena, with enough range to host functions from a Middle Eastern wedding to an Irish memorial service.

But Shahnazarian wanted to draw customers into the bar when Noor wasn't hosting a function, and the New York-born entrepreneur needed more than just the music. After hearing about famed chef Jose Andres' revolutionary small-plates menu at his Washington, D.C.-area restaurants, Shahnazarian knew that he could implement something similar at Noor. But instead of just perusing the menu online, Shahnazarian flew across the country just to have dinner at Zaytinya, Andres' Mediterranean-themed restaurant.

Noor now features an extensive small-plates menu that includes jalapeño hummus, mushroom ravioli, Mediterranean Ahi tuna and chicken luleh brochettes. The menu overhaul is just one example of how Shahnazarian keeps his customers on their toes and as he explains his vision for Noor, it comes back to music.

"Some bands do the same thing for years and years, and that works for them," Shahnazarian said. "But just doing the 'formula' is boring to me. The trick is to evolve."

Whether it's the music or the food, it's clear that inventive evolution is the key ingredient to Noor's formula for success.

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