Martin Audio for by La’ Shukran

A two-storey Levantine themed bar restaurant has been set up in Washington DC’s Union Market District by award-winning, Michelin-starred restaurateur, Michael Rafidi. On the ground floor is Yellow Café, the second location in an already successful bakery concept, and this has now been joined by the vibrant La’ Shukran restaurant. Both areas have been equipped from top to bottom, along with the outside rooftop patio and back stairs alley, linking the two venues, by the recently formed Beltway Audio Group. This is a merger between two young audio entrepreneurs, Doug Cyr of Precision Event Rentals, and his friend Brady Rall - both known in the region as engineers for large local sound systems, largely at raves and warehouse parties.

Rall was first introduced to Martin Audio over a decade ago at Washington DC’s once-beloved underground music venue, U Street Music Hall, while Precision Event Rentals had more recently run Martin Audio systems at events and festivals. “Their faith in the brand was further underpinned earlier this year when seeking potential powered speakers for their rental inventory. “We realised the Blackline range now came in active form and just started buying them in multiples, largely because of the price point and quality of the sound,” said Rall.

The connection with the La’ Shukran project was made after Brady Rall had been providing tech support and operating a DJ programme for Unordinary Inc, a high-

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concept cocktail and restaurant bar group run by Radovan Jankovic and Marko Bogdanovic. It was they who partnered with Michael Rafidi. “So back in March 2024 they invited us to design and install this new project they were working on.”

The fact that it was in a dilapidated warehouse area of DC that was being transformed into a more upscale neighbourhood attracted them. Cyr and Rall led the project, designing the space into four zones. The ground floor, the stylish Yellow, is based on eight Martin Audio ADORN A55, with flown SX210 (2x10) and SX212 (2x12) providing low end extension. Upstairs La’ Shukran required a more powerful approach with four CDD12 and an SX212 sub, with eight further ADORN A55. Here the sound system, described as “incredible” by the installer, plays out everything from Arabic rock and hip hop and Levantine funk to more cool Mediterranean vibes.

In-ceiling speakers are found in the washrooms and ancillary. The two-floor concepts have separate entrances, both have ADORN A55 immediately outside, enabling passing customers to hear the distinct sounds of each concept as they enter. La Shukran is entered through a back alley, and customers ascend a vibrantly tiled staircase, equipped with a further A55 at both the top and bottom of the stairs. “I’ve designed a soundscape that creates the experience of walking into a portal, as if you are walking through Damascus or Beirut or modern-day Marrakech and you hear market sounds, with folkloric instruments,” explains Rall. “That’s your introduction to La’ Shukran.”

Then there is the outdoor rooftop terrace, which forms the fourth zone and features another punchy Martin Audio sound system comprising three wall-mounted CDD10-WR and a further pair of SX110 subs. This is likely to become the venue’s private space. “I’m particularly pleased with the outdoor speakers,” he continues. “Literally there was a hurricane the week after we installed the subs, and I was worried about how they would function after 100mph winds and heavy rain. But they haven’t skipped a beat. The outdoor sound is definitely a highlight.”

Powered by Focusrite Group partners Linea Research - via a pair of 88C20 and an 88C06 - and with versatile digital processing, this is a sophisticated, fully integrated set-up. Any sound source can be sent to any destination, and there is a generous supply of DJ plug-ins and patch panels, with all areas controlled on an app on their phones. “We have both floors iPad synced and wall panels; because it’s a vinyl hi fi bar upstairs we have analogue and DJ lines coming in and it’s hooked up [to a streaming service] and fully integrated in terms of wireless efficiency.”

This is the first of a number of installations that Beltway Audio Group are presently quoting Martin Audio on as they continue to build their reputation. At the same time they are service agents for a number of local clubs and venues in the DC area that they say already have Martin Audio installed.

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