

The Chef and The Rockstar



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"I'm heading to the sold-out, VH1 Save the Music Foundation"

The drive from Napa to Calistoga is about 45 minutes in the winter months. The season matters. Summer, when all the tourists (5 million in 2015 alone) are here can be much longer. Today the rain is light. The fog threads through the mountains thick at Howell Mountain as I travel the winding road to Calistoga.

I'm heading to the sold-out, VH1 Save the Music Foundation event and the first in the 2016 series being held at the **Solage Calistoga** hotel. This event is all about raising funds to restore music education in public schools around the country, bringing music back to children from grade school through middle. It's early evening and quite dark already. The courtyard is lit by a long and narrow fire pit. The dampness of the air mysteriously dissipates as I walk down the corridor to the entrance. The event room is exquisitely appointed. Bright vibrant spotlights create drama and stunning crystal chandeliers simultaneously complement it. The tables are tastefully appointed. Gold chargers compliment the rustic-themed wildflower arrangements. The stage is set. Figuratively and literally.

The Solage is a magical, soothing destination...

I look for a familiar face. Old habits. Being relatively new to The Valley, there are rarely many familiar. The Solage is a magical, soothing destination tucked away deep in Napa Valley. The people are friendly and the staff of Solage, impeccably mannered and ready to serve. The theme, Musically Mastered Menu, is apparent with the unique cocktails being served. I select the B-Vitamin (one can never have enough energy) which is a delightful champagne cocktail. There are trays of red and white wines, a station adorned with the most delectable caviar and salmon blinis. The blinis are so light and fluffy they literally melt on your tongue. The salmon and caviar deliver the long perfect finish and I wish for a meal of blini alone. The room begins to fill, conversation growing more animated and lively.

The meal is one of a kind and delicious and inspired by tonight's "Come On Get Higher" singer-songwriter and VH1 You Oughta Know Artist, Matt Nathanson. The menu features blue crab brought in from Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana, delectable loin and shoulder of Emigh's lamb as the entree, and a guilty pleasure of an impeccably deconstructed sugar pie pumpkin cheesecake for dessert. Once the table is cleared the next wave of wonderful begins.

"BILL MURRAY IS A BADASS IN A WORLD OF KARDASHIANS."

My mind is mildly blown by Matt Nathanson. While I listened to all of his latest music on before I arrived, and enjoyed it, I didn't recognize anything. Not only is he talented, he's funny and charming. When he began his set and sang "All We Are" I had an OMG moment. His set smoothly transitions from musical hits including "Adreneline" and a moment of stand up, a shared inspiration and back again. Nathanson intro'd his Bill Murray song by saying "Bill Murray has only one phone number with an answering machine. If he calls you back you're golden. Can you imagine Steven Spielberg calling and leaving a message? Bill Murray is a badass in the world of Kardashians." Nathanson talks about how music saved his life and the importance of supporting programs like this to give children the opportunity to explore their own creativity and passion with music. While he shares a few laughs, he takes a moment to reflect on his time in the kitchen earlier in the day with Michelin-star talent and Solbar Chef, Brandon Sharp. It's clear there is a camaraderie among these two top-talents.

I circled back with Chef Sharp to ask a few questions about his experience rockstar experience with Matt Nathanson.

KM: *What are some of the aspects of your restaurant's styles that make them truly unique?*

Chef Sharp: Solbar's menu is divided: half is dedicated to lighter dishes that eschew saturated fats, white starches, and red meat-spa-friendly cuisine. The other half is more indulgent: steaks, foie gras, gnocchi, the sorts of compositions more suited to pairing with Napa's full-throttle Cabernet and Chardonnay.

KM: *Creating new & enticing dishes regularly is a big job. How do you ensure that your establishments are setting the stage for the visitor experience?*

Chef Sharp: I taste the fruits and vegetables that are in season, and work with my team to decide how we'd most like to prepare and eat them. Then we make sure they're delicious, and hope for the best.

KM: *Loved the intro at the event where they said all rockstars want to be chefs and all chefs want to be rockstars... Is it true? What elements of a song are different from creating a menu?*

Chef Sharp: The grass is always greener, right? I think writing a song must be harder. It could quite literally be about anything. At least with a menu, the guideposts of location and kitchen equipment and available ingredients give me some parameters within which to work.

KM: *You and Matt Nathanson got some quality time in the kitchen making blinis. What are the parallels that you two share from the standpoint of creating?*

Chef Sharp: When Matt spoke of "creative vomit"-sort of the antithesis of the lightning bolt of inspiration-I laughed, thinking of all the bad ideas I've had that never even made it to the plate. It's part of the process.

This magnificent affair was the first in a series for 2016. Raising well over \$15,000 and resulted in two pianos being purchased for local schools. Since 1997, VH1 Save The Music has brought more than \$52 million total worth of instruments to 1,964 public schools in 233 districts around the country. vh1savethemusic.org/