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SMALL BUSINESS - Building ambience with the right beats - Prescriptive Music's science is finding the perfect music to set the desired tone at restaurants and hotels.

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Allen Klevens and Jason Shapiro don't spin vinyl at parties or nightclubs, but they might just be the ultimate DJs.

If you've checked into a Marriott recently, eaten at Wolfgang Puck's Cut or gotten a facial at Spa Nordstrom, you've probably heard their mixes.

It's a science, said Klevens, a former musician who started his Woodland Hills-based Prescriptive Music business by compiling and peddling soothing CDs for surgeons to play in operating rooms.

Today, Klevens and Shapiro help hotels and restaurants create a vibe. Don't think it matters? Listen to the music next time you're out to dinner, or checking into a resort.

"Music sets the tone for any place – whether you're in the car, whether you're in the home or in a hotel," said Klevens, 34. "However the client wants them to feel, we can portray with music."

Too loud and it overtakes conversations. Too soft and it adds nothing. If it's the morning, it should be mellow. Think Michael Buble and Norah Jones, not the Rolling Stones or **Madonna**, who are better suited for the afternoon.

"You notice it when it's not good or you notice it when it's not there," said Klevens, sitting with Shapiro in The Blvd restaurant and lounge at the Four Seasons Beverly Wilshire. "Put it back on and it changes the whole vibe."

To make their point, they tap into their laptop wired into the hotel's sound system and turn the music off.

In an instant, the room turns loud and hectic – lots of jumbled conversation and noise. Music, they contend, can make all the difference.

Unlike Muzak, in which playlists cannot be altered on site at a moment's notice, Prescriptive Music offers clients a licensed on-demand music system, which allows them to hear what they want, wherever and whenever they want. They also can manipulate playlists to delete songs or play them at a specific time.

A pianist since age 4, Klevens said music is "in my blood." But after graduating from UNLV with a degree in music and communications, he didn't have a plan for how to turn it into a career.

For a while, he sold pianos and television advertising time. Neither made him happy. One day, bored, he went with his dad to a convention in Anaheim for the American Assn. of Operating Room Nurses.

One booth had people lined up to buy a CD, "Music for the O.R.," and the idea hit him.

He formed Prescriptive Music in 1999, with the slogan: "Bringing music to health." He compiled six CDs, finding musicians to create and record music suitable for doctors. One album was a mix of piano and cello music. Cellos are the closest instrument to the human voice and relaxing in tone, Klevens said.

At a trade show, he met someone who introduced him to the Venetian hotel's Canyon Ranch SpaClub.

The Las Vegas spa wanted a new CD and new packaging. It became Klevens' first private-label CD, tailored specifically for the destination.

The Venetian began leaving the CD on pillows in some of its suites. Pretty soon, other spas and hotels started calling Prescriptive to do the same thing for them.

Klevens and Shapiro sift through Internet sites such as MySpace and **Facebook** for emerging artists, and they sign musicians from other countries. Often, customers don't want recognizable songs. They want music that sets a tone and reinforces the message of the place.

One mountain spa in Utah, for example, asked for yodeling music. "I tell you, we scoured everywhere and we found it," Klevens said.

Klevens struck up a friendship with Shapiro through their children and in 2005, they teamed up. Shapiro, a former baseball player for the Chicago White Sox farm system and a real estate lender, helped focus on the business side.

Sales in 2006 ballooned by nearly 300% to \$1.35 million. They expect to double that in 2007. With six employees, including an art director, music director and salesperson, their team is "lean and mean," Shapiro said.

The business has branched out well beyond the branded CDs. Last September, they pioneered what they call "On Key," packaging a CD with a special slot for a hotel key. The CDs are given to guests when they check in. The Flamingo casino in Las Vegas rolled out the CDs as part of their new "Go Rooms" with flat-panel televisions, iPod docking stations and a CD and DVD player. Among their other clients are San Diego's new Ivy Hotel and the Noble House Hotel & Resorts, which has 11 properties in the U.S.

"We're pretty much redefining the Flamingo," said Jay Franken, the hotel's vice president of operations. "We opened in the '50s and we were at the top, but it's gone downhill. Now we're trying to get it back on top again."

With hotel guests, Franken said, "You only have one chance at a first impression." Customers checking into the renovated rooms are handed their key, tucked inside the CD case.

The case also contains a message from the Flamingo's president: "Settle in, unpack and enjoy the music!"

Once in their room, guests can listen to the music, which Franken describes as "down-tempo lounge music." The 15-minute CD includes three mixes and a fourth song by Nils Lofgren, the guitarist from **Bruce Springsteen's** E Street Band.

"The guests love" the CD, Franken said. "A lot of people are taking it with them. We're not getting very many of them back. And customers are asking, 'The music's cool, can we get more?'"

Flamingo may have Klevens and Shapiro put together a full CD of 20 tracks and offer it for sale in the hotel's

gift shop.

Besides the private-label and On Key CDs, Prescriptive Music offers music consulting and custom playlists. Right now, they're helping Marriott International Inc. install music systems at 400 hotels across the country.

Typically, they meet with hotel managers to find out what kind of environment they want to create, then they start building a playlist.

"It's an iPod on steroids," Klevens said. "We can access over 100,000 tracks."

As part of their consulting, Klevens and Shapiro usually tell hotels to turn up the volume. The music is also zoned into chunks of time and types of music. At the Beverly Wilshire, they've created a special jazz-meets-'80s happy hour selection for The Blvd lounge.

In the hotel's spa, the music had to be soothing, but not sleep inducing. After a brief experiment with a vocal track or two, those were ditched in favor of more instrumental tunes. The system is so personalized that spa director Daisy Tepper said the staff could create custom playlists for frequent clients.

"We had 10 CD players playing five CDs and people would say, 'I'm so sick and tired of this music,' " Tepper said. "When I found these guys, I was in heaven."