



How 'Le Sorcier Blanc' became 'the Wizard of Sound'

From '92 onwards..

On the plane back to Paris in October '92, after being one month in Auroville, Didier and I started dreaming about coming back and taking part in the adventure of Auroville. However, at the time there was no way we could do this. At least, no way "within our control".

The year before, Didier and his commercial partner and friend, J. M., had just updated their shared sound recording & mixing facilities for the third time in three years. They had taken a huge loan - too huge to confess - to buy a new mixing board and monitoring system. Even my own mother's house was mortgaged for this! The organisation had five full time employees and ridiculously high running expenses, but despite the financial pressure, all was rolling well, and we finally were established in the highly competitive world of show business..



The grace..

Then.., it so happened that, out of the blue, barely a week after our return to Paris, a friendly client from the French West-Indies said to Didier, "If you are interested in selling your studio shares, I'll buy them."

Didier and I didn't have to think twice! At first our partner J.M. was stunned, but eventually agreed, faced with our determination and carried away by our enthusiasm. From then onwards, it took some two very intense years to finalise all the transfers of assets and responsibilities, but already from day 1 we felt transported, so to speak.. Every day that preceded our arrival, we felt lighter and lighter as the pressure was being slowly released.

So you can understand that when we came in Auroville in '94, we had not the slightest interest in starting a new commercial venture! That experience was burnt out! We could only realise how deeply we had fallen into a trap, and how lucky we had been to get out of it so soon and so well. It was as if some unknown force had graced us with its help.., and carried us here.

First years in Auroville

During the six years that followed, our attention was fully focused on our activities in Auroville. On my (Cecilia's) side, this implied mostly schoolwork at the Auroville Kindergarten, but also greenwork and helping Auroville's guests find accommodation and information. As for Didier, he started out at the Solar Kitchen, first in the kitchen itself, then at the serving counter, and later he helped set up the Kitchen's complex computer programme.

Here and there Didier would also give a hand - or better, an ear! - with concerts or sound recordings of Aurovilian artists, or would go for an occasional recording and mixing session to Chennai studios, often as a 'connaissanceur' for the love and the fun of it. He also visited more and more audio facilities, did sound reinforcement for indoor and outdoor concerts, and started to know more and more people in the audio field in Chennai, and also in Bangalore.

Whereas in France there was always some tension, as competition is fierce in the audio field, here in India Didier felt quite at ease. After all, in the country of Karnatic music, talented Indian 'rock bands' felt like they were in a foreign land, and Didier felt quite at home with them. He could understand their specific sound recording and mixing tastes more than any other Indian sound engineers.

A new way

Then one day the idea came to us that Didier's years of experience in sound could be fruitfully used in a totally new way, in a very creative way, in a way that would make us personally financially stable again in the mid term, and would very likely enable us to contribute financially to the making of the dream of Auroville in the long term.

It had been Didier's experience that the acoustics of the auditoriums or recording studios he had visited were never satisfactory. Acoustics were generally quite poor, and confused with mere 'sound proofing' or 'sound isolation'.

A market study all over India revealed that there were hardly any professionals in the specific field of acoustics at the national level. Since a few years, the entire Indian music & film industry is experiencing a boom in the launching of recording studios, and in almost all cases these are multi-crore projects featuring the best equipment and designed by foreign acoustic engineers at a very high cost. In these circumstances Didier felt quite confident he could become a sought-after acoustic designer right here in India.

Specialising in acoustic design

So the idea was to create a commercial unit specialising in acoustic design. We actually thought about it more than twice!! We have been thinking very long and very hard, and explored our feeling deep inside, whether we really wanted to go into that new direction, which somehow would shift our centre of gravity from inside Auroville to outside Auroville.

Well, at some point it sounded right, and things fell into place. But small scale, mind you. Dozens of books on acoustics, two computers, one printer, a scanner, some highly sophisticated computer acoustic programmes and instruments for calculations, measurements and simulations, and of course the two of us to run the show. That's all it took to start SOUND WIZARD. Didier designing, me doing everything else that needed to be done, communication and coordination wise.

Connection with India

It did take a few months to understand the functioning of a unit here in Auroville and India... ("romba kastam!" we say in Tamil.. It ain't that easy, guys!). We then proceeded to create a network of partners, and now projects are coming in. More and more requests come from recording studios, slowly but steadily, and we feel confident that it will be fun and rewarding. (For more info about what we are doing, have a look at our website: <http://www.soundwizardonline.com>)

Looking back after one year of Sound Wizard business, this new activity has actually connected us much more with India as a whole, which was perhaps lacking in the past. (It always feels great to come back home after a couple of hot sticky dusty days in Chennai!) And the best part of it is that it has also not taken us totally away from Auroville. Most of our work is in the office right here in the Sharnga settlement, and it doesn't take all our time.

Connection with Auroville

In the past year, Didier has been asked to work on the acoustics of different projects, such as the sports hall at Transition School or the upgrading of Bharat Nivas auditorium, or setting up of four home studios for Aurovilian musicians. And during a full school year, Didier trained some four youths in the field of sound recording and sound reinforcement.. Presently he is researching ways to work in cooperation with architects on sound proofing of buildings in general, but particularly in the

case of collective housing and apartments. Now., THAT is a real challenge in our tropical environment, where we like to keep all our windows wide open!

By the way, why the name 'SOUND WIZARD'? Well, Didier Weiss was known as 'Le sorcier blanc' among the African musicians thronging Paris' studios. So our present label is like a wink at his professional past.

See also <http://www.soundwizardonline.com>

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