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Trading hired time for a facility of their own, two Indian music composers have built one of Mumbai's best recording studios, as **Cherag Cama** discovers



Udaykumar Ninjoor and Justin Yesudas have been composing music for the Mumbai advertising industry for the past 13 years. Tired of working in hired studios that did not meet their requirements, they sought a permanent space of their own and teamed up with Ashwath Bhat to build a studio specifically for their needs. 'There are not too many good sounding studios in Mumbai, and that was one of the main reasons for wanting somewhere of our own,' says Mr Ninjoor. After hunting for a suitable site for more than a year, they zeroed in on a building in Bandra, a quiet suburb of Mumbai. 'Ours is a commercial studio which is open to any composer to come and use,' Mr Ninjoor continues.

'Bandra was a good spot, since there are not many studios here. Also, a lot of film people live in and around this suburb, so it is very convenient for them if they want to drop in to do their work. 'Our main criteria were that it should be commercially viable to others when we are renting it out, and that it should be comfortable, good sounding and have a good environment.'

They turned to French designer Didier Weiss of Shakti-based Sound Wizard to help meet these requirements: 'We wanted someone who was good, experienced and who was based in India, not someone from the West who would "remote control" the entire operation. After all, it was a big investment from our side. It took us 16 months to get this place up and running.'

Backwaters

The effort they took shows very clearly. The facility's two studios, the larger Riversound and the medium-sized Backwaters, are located on the third and fourth floors respectively of the building. Both are similar in terms of their equipment. The major difference is in the size of the control rooms. The lobby on the fourth floor outside Backwaters is tastefully decorated, with one wall covered with CD jackets. The door leading to Backwaters' control room is full-length glass, a material widely used throughout: 'We like the idea of sunlight coming into the rooms, and Didier incorporated this into the design,' says Mr Yesudas. 'We were initially scared by the amount of glass, but he assured us that he would take care of it in the acoustic of the space. We trusted him and, as things turned out, both our rooms sound damn good; we are very pleased with the final result.'

In common with many modern studios, a DAW is at the centre of operation. In Backwaters, a Yamaha DM1000 digital mixing desk and outboard gear including a Manley Slam stereo limiter and mic preamplifier flank a Mac running a Pro Tools HD3 system. The stereo monitoring system, meanwhile, uses Genelec 8250A bi-amplified DSP loudspeakers. No corners were cut when it came to buying microphones, and the small vocal booth has a selection that includes Brauner, AKG and Neumann. Even the stands are from K&M, while the headphones for artists are all Sennheiser models.

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Backwaters shares the fourth floor with a composer's room, which is exclusively for the studio's owners. 'When clients are working here, we do not want to disturb them in any way at all, so we have a small room where we can sit with our keyboards and do our composing and programming without getting in their way,' says Mr Ninjoor. 'It also makes them feel secure, as no client likes other composers eavesdropping on their work.' Monitoring in the composers room is on Dynaudio Acoustics BM12A loudspeakers.

Riversound

At the bottom of a flight of stairs is a 200kg acoustic steel door that directly opens into the spacious control room of Riversound, complete with triple-layered glass windows.

There are two booths for recording acoustic instruments and voice. Once again, Brauner, Neumann, AKG and Shure mics do duty here. There is also a small storeroom where visiting musicians can keep their flightcases, bags and other paraphernalia.

As with Backwaters, there is a Mac running Pro Tools HD3 and a Yamaha DM1000 mixer, with two Manley Voxbox valve channel strips providing outboard processing. For reverb, there is a Bricasti M7 digital unit, and monitoring is taken care of by Genelec 1037C three-way active loudspeakers for far-field work and Genelec 8250As for close-field. 'When we were talking with Didier, he took us to some studios in Chennai that were about the same size as ours, and that had Genelec monitors,' says Mr Ninjoor. 'We loved what we heard and that's when we decided to go for Genelecs. If you have your room set-up right, you have the right sound. In fact, because these rooms are so well designed, we do not need a subwoofer. When we did a test, we actually had to reduce the lows in the room by adding more bass traps.

'Didier is a perfectionist and he did a great job. The acoustic glass doors are from Veka, the 200kg steel main door is from Ambico in Canada, the Autex acoustic tiles came from New Zealand and the foam that is used in the design of the walls came from Delhi. Even the air-conditioning is unique. Since we did not have a lot of ceiling height, Didier recommended a company called Unico Systems in the US, which makes a unit that was very quiet and had small snake like pipes to carry the cold air into the studio. Also, since we are in a building with neighbours, Didier put lead sheets in the floor so that no sound would leak outside or from one studio into another. All the glass windows are triple layered and eliminate outside noise completely. India is a very noisy country and we have very noisy festival here each year, with loud drums and firecrackers going off every now and then, but the design takes care of all that. The result is a marvellous studio.'

Kenny and Devang are the studio's regular house engineers: 'We have invested in some of the best mics and outboard gear in the business,' they point out. 'We have the Brauner Valvet and the VM1, and these, coupled with the Manley outboard, sound very warm. Both are tube based and compliment each other very well. Didier's work is excellent and we have a great place to work in.'

Unsurprisingly, Mr Ninjoor and Mr Yesudas are now two very happy composers: 'Not only do we have a great studio, we also have great engineers working for us,' says Mr Ninjoor. 'This combination is unbeatable, and that's what makes our company, Acoustriks great value for all our clients. The stuff going out from here is very much appreciated by all.'

That is bound to happen when so much love and attentions has been poured into a project.

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