

At home while creating tunes

24 Feb 2009, 0516 hrs IST, Priya M Menon, TNN

CHENNAI: It's the place he wanders into whenever inspiration strikes, be it midnight or the break of dawn. Panchathan Record-Inn studio in Kodambakkam, AR Rahman's home studio, where he makes his music, weaves his magic.

The non-descript building has seen the footfalls of many famous musicians, singers, lyricists and directors. From Asha Bhonsle, Lata Mangeshkar, SP Balasubramaniam and Hariharan to Sukhwinder Singh, Alka Yagnik, Ila Arun and Shreya Ghosal the cream of the country's talent have recorded here.

"He often works through the night and drops into the studio at all hours," says an old-time associate. "Rahman lives on the second floor of the building, his mother lives on the first floor, and the studio as well as his office is on the ground floor."

While Rahman's compositions have earned him the status of an icon in the world of music, his technological expertise and knowledge has never failed to impress the people he has worked with. In fact, the young Dilip, who aspired to be an electronics engineer is said to have been drawn to technology rather than music. He used to spend hours experimenting with the synthesiser his father brought from Singapore, one of the first in film circles then.

Rahman established a state-of-the-art studio, AM Studios, in 2005. Located just a street away from Panchathan, AM has facilities that puts it among the best in Asia. While his home studio is exclusive, AM Studios is available for hire. "Big names like John McLaughlin have worked on their projects here," says an associate.

Conceived and designed by Hollywood-based Studio 440, the studio was Rahman's long-term project. "He wanted a studio of international standards, like the ones he had seen abroad, right here," says sound engineer Sivakumar, who has worked with Rahman for 14 years.

To execute the project, Rahman roped in Sound Wizard of Pondicherry in 2003. "I've known him since 1992. He used to consult me whenever he wanted modifications in his home studio," says Didier, who runs the company along with Kumbha Young Grenier. "When he called us in to assess the studio, he already had the design and a part of the studio was built," he says.

They worked on the design in collaboration with Studio 440 with inputs from the maestro. The entire project was completed only by 2005. "The best of equipment was sourced from all over the world. The recording studio is interesting because of the flexibility it offers for music recording and film mixing, thanks to variable acoustics," says Kumbha. "We designed it keeping his usage in mind. The mix stage, which he uses for films also doubles as a recording stage." It can accommodate upto 30 musicians for large recordings. The control room has a large bay window which offers a full view of the big screen in the mix stage. There are also two additional isolation booths with large glass sliding doors, offering easy viewing to and from the main recording area.

What they admire about Rahman is his technological expertise. "He is also a very good sound engineer," says Didier. "Most of the time, when I interact with musicians or music directors, they don't have the proper vocabulary to explain what they want in technical terms. Rahman is different and can talk about the technical aspects of sound; that's where he stands apart from the rest."

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