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The Mighty Wah

A new studio has opened in Mumbai's Bandra suburb designed by acoustic consultancy, Sound Wizard. **Caroline Moss** reports

COMPOSER AND PRODUCER

Dhruv Ghanekar is a happy man. As well as being a partner in the Bluefrog live music enterprise which operates venues in Mumbai and Delhi, Mr Ghanekar has just opened Wah Wah, his own recording studio and music production house in Bandra, Mumbai.

Originally operating out of Bluefrog's flagship Mumbai venue, Mr Ghanekar decided to relocate the studio into independent premises as the company moved increasingly into the food and beverage industry, divesting itself from its recording concerns.

'We set up the studio at the club a year after we opened Bluefrog,' he explains. 'However my own recording work is primarily in film and advertising, and over the past two years that work has been moving out to the suburbs. This got me thinking about setting something up in Bandra. We found this space, and it was interesting because it's 305 sq-m and basically glass on three sides. I liked the fact there were windows to give natural daylight, so I acquired the premises then contacted Sound Wizard to help with the acoustics.'

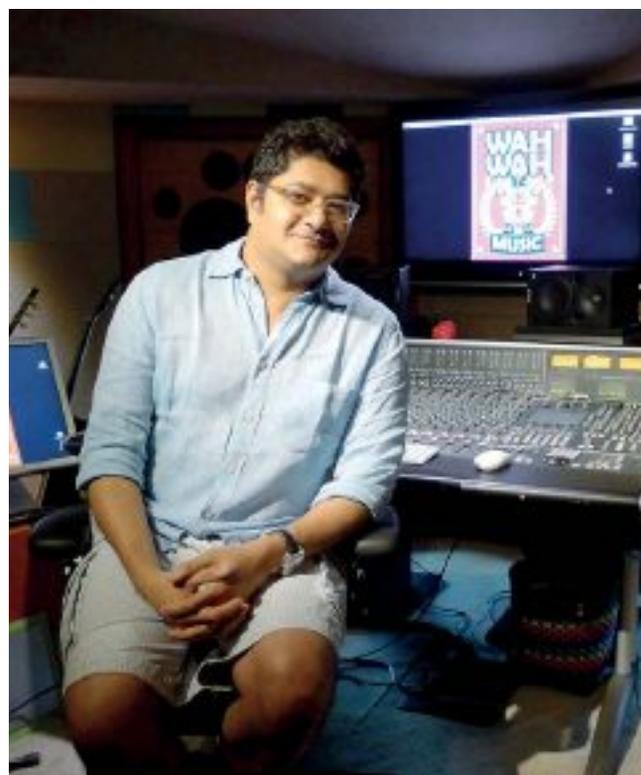
Pondicherry-based Sound Wizard, run by French acoustician Didier

Weiss and CEO Kumbha Young Grenier, had worked on the acoustic design of the Bluefrog club in Delhi.

'Dhruv wanted the studio to have a very open feel with a lot of glass to let in natural light and to have a lot of visual contact between rooms,' explains Mr Young Grenier. 'This brief worked very well because these are elements we always try to integrate into our designs. The challenge to make this work was available space; being Mumbai this is almost always restricted, so we needed to find a way to make the glazing angles work in terms of reflection, and have enough surface area to take care of absorption for the mixing position sweet spot.'

The initial plan was to create two studios out of the available space. 'Sometimes there are weeks in the month when it is sheer craziness, and the volume of work means I need two studios,' reasons Mr Ghanekar. 'So that was the initial plan, and we designed it for two studios but it was a bit cramped. One night before we were about to start construction I called up Didier and Kumbha and told them I was pulling the plug on the second studio, as I didn't think there was enough space. It took time to get my head

'The guys at Sound Wizard managed to get the imaging just right'



Composer and producer Dhruv Ghanekar in his control room

around the idea I wasn't going to have two studios, but it was a very good call.'

Mr Young Grenier concurs. 'With this design the lounge area is much more comfortable and spacious,' he indicates. 'For this facility, the lounge area is as important as the studio because there are often lots of people here who need a separate area to have meetings in.'

Consequently the plans were altered to provide a 27 sq-m control room, a 15 sq-m recording space and a large lounge/office area of approximately 50 sq-m, with construction beginning in November 2011. In the meantime Mr Ghanekar worked out of his room at Bluefrog until April 2012, when he moved all the equipment over to Wah Wah.

'It's so great to be in here now, I'm happy with the sound, that's the most important thing, and the place has turned out really nicely.' The studio's interior was handled by Mr Ghanekar's wife, a professional interior designer, whose artfully-distressed furniture and panels constructed from vintage painted wood gives Wah Wah a personal, homely touch.

The main monitors are Dynaudio/Munro custom M3s which were originally mounted vertically at the Bluefrog studio. 'We've installed them horizontally here, and I'm really pleased with the way they sound,' he says. The M3s are powered by Chord SPA 1032 amps; near-field monitoring is provided by Yamaha MSP5A self-powered speakers.

Wah Wah's control room is installed with a Solid State Logic AWS 900+

analogue console that Mr Ghanekar bought in 2007. 'It's fantastic, the best investment I ever made,' he enthuses. 'It transcends fashion, and I think it will stand the test of time. This is a great tracking room, and it's also a good "dead" room for monitoring. The guys at Sound Wizard managed to get the imaging just right, and everyone who's been in it



Wah Wah's plush control room

has commented on that. Sonically the live room is the exact opposite of the control room; musicians love the sound in there and it has a nice vibe.'

Outboard equipment includes a UBK Fatso compressor, Manley Slam limiter and mic preamp, Bricasti M7 reverb and Eventide H4000 harmoniser, plus Moog and Dave Smith Tetra synthesisers. A to D conversion is provided by Prism Sound Dream ADA 8XRs, and for those who prefer to remain in the analogue domain, there is a Tascam BR20T quarter-inch tape machine.

Mr Ghanekar, who has been

composing music for advertising and film for around 14 years and also performs live, is happy to be settled in his new facility. 'I've now moved studios about three times in the last 10 years, and it's the same story time and time again,' he says. 'Constructing a new studio is a painful and exacting thing to do. The entire building work revolves around



The studio has a broad selection of outboard

minuscule measurements, and people in Mumbai are more used to working in inches than millimetres!' Describing his current workload as 'quite chaotic', with multiple projects sharing the same space, Mr Ghanekar is hopeful of adding a second room later this year.

Adds Mr Young Grenier: 'Soundproofing is also a big issue when working in such close proximity with other people in the building. We've constructed a room within a room, and the joints have to be absolutely perfect, they have to be airtight. Getting the carpenters and contractors to take that amount of care is a big task, you have to be very insistent.'

That insistence has paid off. Wah Wah, with its retro styling and classic gear, is a professionally designed and unique addition to Bandra's booming studio scene.

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