



Pictures by Louis of Teddington

Yash Raj Films

A brand new ground-up studio complex has raised the bar in the Indian film audio production scene and set the standards for others to follow. Like so many other Bollywood hopefuls before him, ZENON SCHOEPE goes to Mumbai.

AT A TIME WHEN so many audio centres around the world are dropping facilities or trying to reinvent themselves as leaner and meaner operations to better fit in with the realities of their client base, someone is always building something in Mumbai. Home to India's Bollywood film industry, you can't spend long in the town before hearing about this proposed build, that completing build or that new facility's first session. It has a curious dynamic as a media centre because while the core of the trade is concerned with the enormous throughput of Indian films it's also expanding in different directions to accommodate and take advantage of new outlets and activities. It's also a market that is mature, organised, open and growing and it's not for nothing that many observers regarding India as a territory that is likely to achieve its fuller potential long before China ever will.

From an audio standpoint, the new builds are concentrated on studios for the booming music for record and film markets for well-heeled composers, regular expansions in film audio facilities and the occasional massive ground-up build. The opening of the fabulously impressive Yash Raj Films (YRF) studio

complex is a fine example of the last of these.

India's most successful film maker, Yash Chopra, started his own Yash Chopra Studios in 1970 as a film making company and grew it through the success of producing some of the highest grossing films in the country. Today the activities of the group are wide ranging with interests in film production and film distribution, home entertainment (DVDs), a music label plus music shows, music videos, advertising, Internet, E-commerce and content to mobile. In 2004 it was rated as the number one film distribution house in India and the 27th biggest in the world. The opening of the studio complex in October is another step towards the dream of consolidating YRF as the most complete entertainment conglomerate in India.

The complex is not just about audio facilities, which occupy their own wing on the massive plot, but also includes offices for the Group's other activities. There are rehearsal areas, make up and dressing rooms and three sound stages that claim to be the only completely soundproofed and air-conditioned studios in India and the biggest for indoor shooting. Avids are

housed in the admin part of the site and are dedicated to in-house film making purposes.

The audio wing includes six studios all designed by Martin Pilchner with big Genelec monitoring in 5.1 throughout. Recording Studio 1 can accommodate an 80-piece orchestra, has four iso booths and is equipped with a 48-channel AMS Neve 88R. Monitoring in the positively huge (990sqft) control room is via Genelec 1036s and 7073 sub. Recording Theatre 2 can accommodate 24 musicians and has a control room with an AMS Neve Libra and monitoring through 1039As and 7073 sub.

There's also a 40-fader, 160-channel DFC-II in a 116-seater Dolby Digital and DTS-approved film mix theatre running to DLP Projector and 35mm. Libras and AudioFiles are installed in a dubbing suite and a Foley suite, the former with stereo 1039As, the latter with 1039As and 7073. Finally a Digidesign Icon resides in a tracking suite with a 5.1 system made up from 1039Cs, 8040s, and a 7073. The AMS digital desks and AudioFiles are networked.

What's impressive about the place is the individuality of the rooms and spaces, and how well equipped they are. I've now been to enough Indian studios to know that some are finished to a higher standard than others. YRF is finished to an exemplary standard and includes the first use of locally-sourced large-scale laminated glass in the sort of lengths and quantities that have not been employed in the region before.

There are also the incredible ceiling heights as Daman Sood, senior technical consultant engineer, explains. 'We sacrificed one floor above for the height. It's 24 feet to the concrete ceiling. And the NC level in every room is 15 or 18 — figures like that.



We have special silencers on the air conditioning.' Clearly money no object, then, as demonstrated by the frighteningly well-stocked outboard racks that are crammed full of exotica and the massive mic collections — all with covers to protect them from Mumbai's rampant humidity.

Daman (pictured on the front cover) is a recording engineer by profession, had his own studio and worked for a variety of film makers including Chopra. Chopra had been using outside facilities and started to think about building his own and Daman was hired to manage the technical side of the installation. He researched film making complexes worldwide and recommended Pilchner to design the place as he believed that the studios had to be built to international standards if they were to attract international clients.

'In the Indian market the Genelecs are regarded as extremely rugged and people do try to blow them up,' he explains. 'So they are strong monitors and that had a bearing on the decision and they are also well proven in India, which is important.

'In India people like to listen loud, that's the main thing. If you're doing a 5.1 mix of a multitracked orchestra you want a big sound and the idea behind it is that at no point in that listening experienced should

the speakers enter into distortion — you have a lot of headroom! The control rooms have high ceilings and you need big monitors to get a lot of LF energy working in that space.'

There are two more floors available above the audio rooms for expansion — again with 24-foot ceilings — and enough space for three studios at least and a number of smaller suites should they be required. There may also be a requirement to build other types of room to support the organisation's diversification.

YRF really is the most ambitious and all encompassing build in Mumbai in recent times and it genuinely does raise the bar. Daman says that the lack of distinction among many Indian studios relates back to how the decision processes are made. 'Unfortunately, in India the technicians are not here to act as consultants,' he says. 'Normally in India, the man who has the money is the man who makes the studio. Now, I know how to cook but I'm not a chef and if I wanted to open a restaurant I would have to hire a chef who would tell me what he needed in his kitchen. In most of the studios in India it is the owner who decides on the equipment and they are often not technicians.

'The most important ingredient in a studio is the environment — the acoustic, the alignment. You shouldn't correct acoustics with equalisers. Acoustics is a science and it needs to be dealt with correctly particularly because of digital technology — if you're 24-bit and have a 144dB dynamic range then you need to have a quiet studio,' he adds. 'I am a film mixer and I understood what kind of facility our country needs to compete on the international stage and I was able to help Mr Chopra invest his money.'

Daman says that the signature of a high quality Indian film is the use of live musicians for the score, which is why the large orchestral room was built. 'The producer gets a benefit from using a room like that,' he says. 'If you have 40 strings playing at once you record to 16-track, you listen to it once and you do the job in three hours. If you multitrack with a smaller number of strings you have to tune each time, you're always getting flanging, and instead of three hours it takes you 12. Better to work with the bigger orchestra, you can hear it as it is and change it immediately if you have to.'

A strong advocate of it being the people and not the equipment that makes a successful studio, Daman says that the new studio complex has an objective that he believes can be achieved. 'With a studio like this, how many films a year can we do? Maybe 12 or 14 as a share of 170 films a year. That's a 10% share and half of those are our own productions and half are from good film producers from outside. We want to get the cream of Bollywood films, that's our target.' ■



Contact

YRF STUDIOS, MUMBAI, INDIA:
Website: www.yfrstudios.com