



Vinay Sridhar at the controls of the Neve Genesys Black

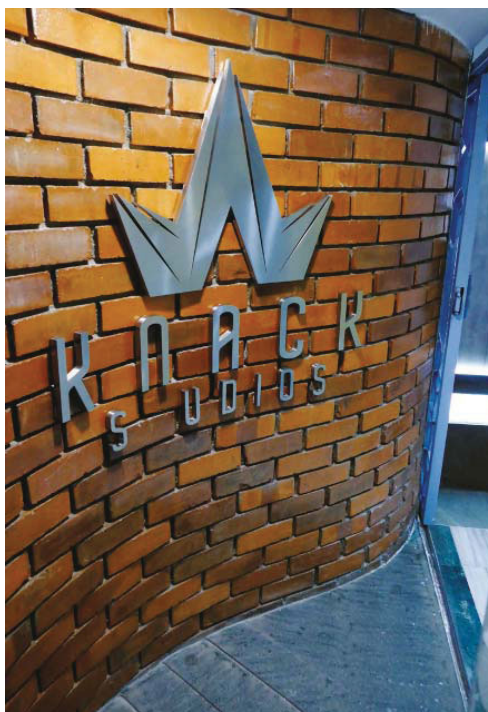
# Jewel in the crown

A new commercial studio in Chennai has been set up to handle all aspects of audio and video postproduction.

**Caroline Moss** drops into Knack



WSDG-designed Dolby Atmos room



## FOR INDIAN SONGWRITERS AND MUSICIANS, THE SUREST

way to commercial success is via the movies, and this applies as much to the South Indian Tamil film industry as it does to Mumbai's Bollywood. So when Chennai-based jewellery empire NAC wanted to invest in a new business, it made sense to get involved in one of the region's growing concerns and provide the burgeoning film industry with a world-class facility. Wisely, the company pulled in an experienced crew of local industry professionals to help execute the project, with New York-based WSDG also recruited to design some of the audio studios.

'It was something of a radical idea when it started off,' muses Vinay Sridhar, an audio engineer who often works in partnership with co-engineer and Modi Digital director, Aditya Modi. 'It all began when we needed to mix something and it was proving difficult to find a studio. We told one of our friends at NAC, who was looking to expand his business ventures, and advised him that there was a market in Chennai for a studio like this. There was a dearth of studios available to rent, and there was so much work out there. The initial idea was for a music studio, and then it grew into a bigger concept.'

And indeed, renovation of the commercial premises expanded to convert the entire building into a facility that would be capable of handling every aspect of audio and video film postproduction. All audio facilities were overseen by Mr Modi and Mr Sridhar, working closely with Harish Raam LH, co-founder and president of Knack. Mr Raam has a long career in the film industry, having worked as a distributor and associate director, and was able to provide feedback from a client's perspective. 'Our CEO Anandha Ramanujam's passion for cinema has taken shape as Knack



ADR suite



Large live area

Studios,' he explains. 'The biggest advantage is that we have built this studio keeping in mind client comforts and technicians' requirements with regard to the technologies used here. As an associate director, I visited most film postproduction studios, and I thought it would be great if all postproduction could happen in one studio, saving a lot of time and cost. I have also worked as a music supervisor, which gave me a lot of knowledge on the music and audio postproduction side as well. So the whole studio has been designed from a client's perspective. At Knack we are striving to give the film fraternity the best working experience.'

Before the studio could throw its doors open, a renovation period of around a year took place. 'We reconstructed and renovated the interior and had it beautifully designed,' continues Mr Sridhar, who is now Knack's technical head. 'As a sound engineer, I've been working extensively with music and film. My father was a sound engineer who began his career with A R Rahman, and who worked with Aditya's father in the early days; we used to do recording projects at home and I was very interested in it. It's a passion of mine; it's in the blood and I'm trying to replicate some of the things that were being done by those guys back in the day.'

One of Mr Modi's contributions to the project was to bring in studio design company WSDG, which his company represents in India. The first floor of the building is dedicated to audio and was designed entirely by WSDG. It encompasses a large recording and mixing control room and live studio that can accommodate a small orchestra, a Dolby Atmos film mixing studio and a further ADR/audio production suite.



Aditya Modi

years' experience working in this way in numerous countries around the world. 'This practice has become an asset and has proved efficient and cost effective,' explains WSDG partner and director of design, Renato Cipriano. 'At our end we learn from the clients' culture and methods, and, at their end, they learn new technologies and techniques, and how to implement them. There is always growth when we share our experiences and that is what makes these projects fun to work with.'

'Additionally, Aditya Modi had worked as an intern in our New York office early in his career. He understands both our work process and our corporate culture, and this knowledge enabled him to serve as an effective interface between the client and our design team. Having Aditya on the ground during the build out was beneficial to both sides. Knack has a very unique atmosphere expressed by the colours, finishes and by the programmable lighting elements that play an important role in the vibe of each space.'

Upstairs on the second floor is a smaller version of the Atmos room downstairs. This room was designed by Manoj Kumar, owner of local recording school, Soundtechnic Media, who also helped oversee the WSDG designs. 'We generally start the mix here and finish it downstairs,' explains Mr Modi. 'All the speakers are identical to the ones below, and we have a smaller version of the Avid console, an S3.'

The second floor also houses one of the facility's two DI (digital intermediate) rooms that, like all the video rooms at Knack, were designed by the late Ashish Nanajkar, a partner of Mr Modi's who tragically passed away during the construction process. Mr Nanajkar also designed a second DI room on the third floor. Both DI rooms are installed with Baselight Two systems that, apart from handling colour grading for cinema and online, are also ready for stereoscopic grading.

The third floor also incorporates a large VFX bay with 60 workstations for CGI work. Here, two shifts per day will be carried out, making it possible to handle 120 shifts in a 24-hour period. 'This will be the part of the facility that generates a lot of revenue, and it's one of the reasons why we graduated from wanting to be an audio-only facility to including video too,' explains Mr Modi. 'Now we are fully equipped to handle end-to-end projects.'

All equipment for the entire facility was installed and integrated by Studio Care, with Dolby handling set up for the two Atmos rooms. The facility is also equipped with three lounges and a games room in the basement, to accommodate the large number of actors, musicians and filmmakers working on sessions in the building.



**Recording and mix studio**

The recording studio - which is also being used extensively as a VIP ADR room and scoring stage - has a Neve Genesys Black G64 mixing console, soffit-mounted Dynaudio M3XE main monitors and a 5.2 system of three Eve Audio SC407 and two SC307 speakers with two TS112 subwoofers. The 36m<sup>2</sup> control room has full view of the isolation booth and the 42m<sup>2</sup> live room, which has a 120-inch projection screen for scoring.

Mr Sridhar and Mr Modi were responsible for equipping the audio studios with all the relevant equipment. 'For the scoring stage, we initially wanted to have a lot of analogue outboard gear, but then we decided against that and went with a really good console that has everything in it,' says Mr Modi.

The choice of a Neve Genesys Black has combined a traditional studio approach with the ability to easily integrate new technology. 'It does everything a modern-day studio can; we can interface it with Pro Tools and Logic,' says Mr Modi with some pride, mentioning that this is the first Genesys Black to be installed in India.

To achieve the correct ceiling height in Knack's largest Dolby Atmos room, located on the same floor as the recording stage, a major engineering project had to be carried out to remove the floor above. The resulting double-height, 85m<sup>2</sup> room accommodates a Dolby Atmos-approved QSC system consisting

of 32 SR-1030 cinema surround loudspeakers, two SR-1290 surround speakers, two SB-5118 and two SB-7218 cinema subwoofers, and three SC-423C screen channel speakers. It is also equipped with an Avid Pro Tools S6 modular control surface and a 250-inch Galalite screen.

Completing the first floor is an ADR and audio production studio with a 14m<sup>2</sup> control room and 12m<sup>2</sup> recording space, equipped with an L-C-R system of Eve SC305 active speakers with SC205 surrounds and a TS110 subwoofer.

WSDG constructed each of the three spaces as a floating 'room-within-a-room', using the latest acoustical simulation and tools, including the company's proprietary room mode calculator, ABEC Acoustic Boundary Element Calculator, and Insul, which predicts the sound insulation of walls, floors and ceilings, to create acoustically balanced environments in compliance with international standards of isolation and internal room acoustics. Special attention was paid to low-frequency control in every room in an effort to create a professional production and postproduction environment.

This was the first world-class facility that WSDG has completed on the subcontinent, and the entire design project was carried out remotely, with local supervision. The company has production offices on three continents and more than 45



**Second-floor Dolby Atmos room**

When PAVL Asia visited, Knack had been up and running for around three months, working on a multitude of South Indian film projects. 'It's been a very good start,' says Mr Sridhar. 'We've also done some good work with Sony Music which wants to get on board and start working with independent musicians here in the music studio. It's been a while since a large independent artist has come around due to the dominance of film music. Lots of the independent musicians in Mumbai started off scoring film music, and we hope we can do something like this in Chennai.'

With the broad range of technology and services on offer, Knack looks certain to help both Chennai's film and music industries in their ongoing development.

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