

Prasad Labs and Pro Tools - Pioneers of India

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By Stephen Briel

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Stephen Briel caught up with Arun Kumar Bose, Chief Recording Engineer with Prasad Labs to discuss both the technical and "spiritual" means of working with Pro Tools in India.

SB. Prasad Labs is a name synonymous with both "Bollywood" and Indian movie production in general. Arun, would you provide a brief profile and history of Prasad Labs?

AKB. Prasad Labs is a pioneer in providing integrated laboratory services to the motion picture industry. The company is represented in Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bangalore, Bhubhaneshwar and Trivandrum, and has a history spanning five decades.

The company is part of the larger Prasad Group, which also encompasses the Prasad EFX Corporation and Prasad Video Digital among others. Prasad Video Digital presents a unique set of enabling technologies that support a truly integrated "start to finish" postproduction environment.



Chandrakumar working at the DTS Mix Studio, Prasad Video Digital with a Sri Lankan client

SB. So how many studios are currently in operation, and what is the breakdown?

AKB. Prasad Labs have both Audio Studios (for voice over and sound effects creation) and Audio Recording Studios (for song and background score audio track mixing). The studios range from 700 sq.ft. to 4000 sq.ft. in floor space (easily accommodating a large orchestra) and are a dream to work in. In fact, Prasad Labs in Chennai has one of Asia's largest recording studios.

There are 16 studios in total, consisting of six 5.1 mixing studios, six dubbing theatres for spot recording and effects and four recording studios. All studios are equipped with Pro Tools and cater to most sound formats.

SB. Speaking of the Chennai complex, I noticed a beautiful mosaic "floral" arrangement at the entrance.

AKB. This floral arrangement is what we call 'Kolam' where coloured or white rice flour is used to make these intricate designs, in the form of flowers, animals and birds or anything that denotes nature, in order to welcome the Goddess Lakshmi, who represents wealth. The general procedure in South India is to tidy up the entrance of the home or office first thing in the morning and then apply 'Kolam'. Today, of course, there are other substitutes in the market for the rice flour and some establishments go to the extent of permanently painting the entrance to their building with these intricate designs so that it is not an oft-repeated activity!

SB. What is the reason behind choosing Digidesign products for the work at Prasad Labs?

AKB. Digidesign, like Prasad Labs, is a pioneer in its field and trusted in work circles. Digidesign recording is the most popular, and the products are very cost effective as well as professional. ProTools and all Digidesign products are professionally accepted on a common platform in India and abroad. The same cannot be said about other company's products.



Kolam at entrance to Prasad Labs complex in Chennai, India.

Additionally, apart from the products and the features themselves, the relationship we share with Real Image (Indian distributor for Digidesign) and the mutual trust that exists between us influences our decision to buy Digidesign products too.



Engineer Lakshminarayan working at the 70 mm mix studio with a client from Malaysia

SB. How have Digidesign products enhanced the workflow at Prasad Labs?

AKB. With Digidesign products, the fact is that plug-ins are easily available and with ProTools in all our studios, easy workflow is enabled. Projects can be handled across studios and even foreign projects are undertaken thanks to Digi Translator.

SB. Are there any features in Digidesign products that you find particularly helpful?

AKB. Digidesign was the first to make control surfaces and we decided to take full advantage of the situation. We were the first in India to put to use the control surface. It was a very appropriate and professionally made product as well as cost effective.

Secondly, Digidesign is a commonly used platform and available in every studio at Prasad so shift engineers here can work across any of the sixteen studios without any hassles. Also, Digidesign has a range of equipment to suit economically made studios. For smaller studios, Digi 002 is apt. For slightly higher end, we can opt for the control surface. On a higher platform, the Pro Control can be used.

SB. Arun, are there any projects that you have worked on, or am currently working on that you would like to mention?

AKB. We recently worked on a Sri Lankan movie titled "Surya Aranya". It was made on 70mm film, and utilized a Pro Control with HD 3 system, and also Dolby Digital.

It was a controversial movie based upon Buddhist culture, depicting their life and made without their consent. However the film earned rave reviews and was the greatest box office hit in Sri Lankan movie history. One contributing factor to this success was the quality of the production, with initial critics and skeptics, encouraging other people to go and see it.

SB. Did Pro Tools play a significant role?

AKB. The night ahead of the movie's release we found out that there was a 24/25 time frame problem and the telecine had been done on 25 so the sound was not syncing with the film negatives. But we managed to make it 24 with ProTools, test the full sync and even transfer in time for the movie to make it to the Censor Board for certification and then be released on time. This was possible only because of the Pro Tools and the digital technology of today.



The team from Prasad Labs Chennai - From left to right - Parthasarthy (Senior Engineer - Optical Transfer), Nataraj (General Assistant), Loius Babu (Manager - Sound Recording Studio), Arun Kumar Bose (Chief Engineer - Prasad Sound Digital), Mardurajan (Assistant Maintenance Engineer), Gopichander (Maintenance Engineer), Srinivasan (Recording Engineer) and Saravanan (General Assistant).

SB. Any final comments you would like to make Arun regarding Prasad Labs and/or Pro Tools?

AKB. We are very professional towards our work and try to the best of our abilities to provide a good quality end result. If there is a mistake on our part we don't charge the client. We try to meet the target of the customer and are very accommodating in nature. All projects are treated as ours once they enter our premises. Even if it is client's error, be it a 24/25 or a non sync or an optical transfer or any other problem, we go into the details and make it our duty to rise to the occasion and do what we can. It's just the way we work - with utmost sincerity. On the product front, we are happy and satisfied and have no looms at all.