

A sonic sanctuary

Caroline Moss visits Chordfather, a studio complex offering flexible creative possibilities to the music-makers of Mumbai

NESTLED IN A GREEN, SERENE CORNER OF MUMBAI, Chordfather stands as a beacon for audio professionals and artists seeking a world-class space to create, collaborate and craft music. Founded by acclaimed producer Sunny M R, whose Bollywood credits include films such as Brahmastra, Barfi, Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani and Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani, Chordfather is a passion project built on legacy, technology and community. Sunny, a long-time fan of Francis Ford Coppola's mafia saga, launched Chordfather Productions in 2015: a 7.1 surround studio in his apartment building. The idea to open a bigger facility occurred to him in 2021 and the search for new premises began. "When I decided I want a Dolby-certified Atmos setup. I also knew I needed a bigger space," he explains. "We wanted somewhere that artists

could walk into with a song and walk out or with a finished masterpiece. Once suitable premises had been found, Chordfather Productions has steadily evolved into a multi-studio production house offering end-to-end services, from music composition and production to engineering and recording. A permanent in-house team of 16 musicians, composers and engineers can, between them, handle the gamut of recording projects, from film scores and OTT shows to indie tracks and advertising jingles. Back in 2007, Sennheiser/Neumann had sent Sunny some Klein + Hummel KH 310 speakers to try. "They had recently integrated Klein + Hummel into the company and were redoing some designs," he recalls. "I was blown away by these speakers." Many years later, on deciding to add an Atmos mix room to Chordfather, he decided to stay with what he knew, choosing

to install an immersive Neumann monitoring solution and approaching Hrishikesh Ingle, business head of audio recording at Sennheiser India, to plan and execute the speaker setup Sunny and his wife Jenny designed the space and acoustic architecture layout, working with Karan Grover of Dolby India and his team to calculate the 7.1.4 configuration. The Neumann KH 310 monitors that make up the system are a redesign of the KH8 originals. Eleven of these comprise the L-C-R, surround and overhead channels, with dual KH 810 subwoofers handling the low frequencies. Once the system had been installed, Bhasker Pal from Dolby India came in to tune and calibrate the speakers. Not only has the addition of a Dolby Atmos mix studio raised the stakes for Chordfather, it has also laid the foundation for a deeper collaboration, establishing the facility as a Neumann studio monitor experience centre.



Sunny in the Neumann KH 310 Dolby Atmos mix studio



Neumann KH 120 speakers in a small production room



Some of the studios are named after Sunny's rescue dogs: this one is Mango

While Chordfather Productions continues to serve clients from the film and advertising worlds, Chordfather Records - launched in May 2024 - was born out of a personal vision of Sunny's to create a sanctuary where indie artists would feel at home, collaborate freely and grow without creative restrictions. "I've worked for most of my career making music for Bollywood and Tollywood [Telugu] films, but I've shifted my focus to non-film music, concentrating on building a strong team of music producers and songwriters," he says. To this end he's setting up what he terms "songwriting session exchanges", inviting collaborators from around the world to work at Chordfather with local artists. An initial example of this saw Dutch record producer Martin Garrix collaborating with Indian producer and musician Arijit Singh to record sessions featuring multiple instruments at Chordfather Records.

Featuring eight specialised rooms named after the couple's rescue dogs, Chordfather Records provides a selection of recording, composition and production facilities to suit all budgets and projects. Between them, the studios offer over 90 microphones, 86 mic preamps and 132 recording channels with Merging Anubis for monitor control. A collection of synthesizers includes a Roland 808 drum machine, a Yamaha DX7 plus equipment from Juno, Moog and a wide selection of Dave Smith Instruments gear.

Three of the eight studio are Dolby Atmos Music enabled, and all eight are installed with a combination of Neumann KH 310, KH 150 and KH 120 and Sonodyne SM 3300, SM 3200 and SM200 monitors to ensure continuity between sessions in the different rooms. Neumann's MA 1 automatic monitor alignment software has been used to align all the speakers. A variety of microphones from AEA (ribbon mics), Neumann (including an M49V large-diaphragm tube mic) Manley Labs, Chandler and SE Electronics is available, along with microphone preamps from Manley Labs, LaChapelle Audio, API, SSL and others that Sunny has collected over the years. Mastering equipment includes WesAudio digitally controlled analogue tools, Manley Labs units and Flock Audio Patch routing systems.

An unusual feature for a Mumbai recording facility is a flexible 55m² space with floor-to-ceiling mirrors along one wall which can be used, variously, as a music



Custom white Sonodyne 3300 monitors take pride of place in the large studio

production and songwriting studio, a live band rehearsal room, a dance studio and a recording facility as well as for masterclasses, video shoots and livestreams.

This has been installed with custom-made Sonodyne 3300 speakers in white. A Sonodyne user since 2010, Sunny contacted the Indian manufacturer's CEO,

Anindya Mukherjee who configured the speaker's tonality to suit the acoustics of the multipurpose room. All the studios are networked using Merging Horus audio-over-IP AD/DA converters, allowing recording to be carried out over LAN in any area of the complex, even the two kitchens and recreation spaces. Cameras and screens in all rooms assist communication in different parts of the facility. Fresh air ventilation in every room enhances functionality and comfort, while the verdant nature outside intersects into several spaces where the building has been designed to wrap around trees deemed too valuable to remove. Sunny's approach blends old-school analogue warmth with modern digital flexibility: "I track with analogue gear but operate completely in the box," he says. "It's about using the best of both worlds. Just like The Godfather is about family, Chordfather Records is about community. It's a space where cutting-edge tech meets a lounge-like warmth designed to make artists feel at ease."

This partly stems from having his previous studio setup at home. "I'm used to working in the same room with the musicians and vocalists performing together, recording a live session," he says adding that he trains his team to work in this way as well as individual tracklaying. "It's not like we don't have separate rooms for tracklaying. I just find it more personal to work in the same room. When the studio was in my home I got used to working like that."

As part of his mission to keep studio culture alive in an era of home setups, Sunny is integrating workshops and mentorship programmes into Chordfather Records, equipping emerging artists with the skills needed to thrive in an ever-evolving industry. By building a sustainable ecosystem supported by in-house work, tie-ups with labels and commercial projects, he aims to prove that premium recording spaces still have a vital role to play.

"We're not just about the tech," he asserts. "Music is about emotion connection and storytelling. Everything we've built here - from the gear to the people - is to support that vision."

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