

Transcript: Overcoming sonic stalemates – representing cultural diversity in sample packs – Dr Manuella Blackburn

1

00:00:18,283 --> 00:00:22,033

(Sitar music plays)

2

00:00:22,033 --> 00:00:27,666

(The sitar playing a repeated melody)

3

00:00:28,600 --> 00:00:30,500

Hi, I am Dr Manuella Blackburn

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00:00:30,500 --> 00:00:32,633

and I am a lecturer at the Open University.

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00:00:32,899 --> 00:00:35,000

I am a woman in my late 30s.

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00:00:35,000 --> 00:00:37,250

I am from Colombian and British descent.

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00:00:37,633 --> 00:00:39,649

I have dark brown hair and brown eyes.

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00:00:39,649 --> 00:00:44,933

So through my compositional practise,
I work with sounds, sounds from the environment,

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00:00:44,933 --> 00:00:49,566

sounds from instruments,
and I create new pieces of music from those sounds.

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00:00:49,566 --> 00:00:53,183

(Tabla music plays)

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00:00:53,183 --> 00:00:58,483

And then I bring these sounds into the
studio environment and create new sonic landscapes,

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00:00:58,483 --> 00:01:00,850

new pieces of music through these sounds.

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00:01:01,600 --> 00:01:03,233

Hi, my name is Alok Nayak.

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00:01:03,233 --> 00:01:05,533

I am CEO and artistic director of Milap.

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00:01:06,099 --> 00:01:07,849

I'm a male in my 40s.

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00:01:07,849 --> 00:01:11,383

I have got black hair and black beard,
both of which are going grey.

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00:01:11,650 --> 00:01:13,099

And I'm of Indian origin.

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00:01:13,483 --> 00:01:15,833

Milap is an Indian arts and culture company.

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00:01:15,833 --> 00:01:19,583

We are based in Liverpool

and we work nationally all over the country,

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00:01:19,583 --> 00:01:23,633

have international links as well with India,
Singapore and other places.

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00:01:26,316 --> 00:01:32,916

So a lot of the work we do is in producing
new music, helping artists in their work as well.

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00:01:33,450 --> 00:01:39,000

This project started back in 2013,
where I collaborated with Milap

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00:01:40,033 --> 00:01:46,516

on a project to record musical
instruments from the Indian classical tradition.

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00:01:47,000 --> 00:01:53,000

And then the public benefit of that
project was actually to create a website and an app.

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00:01:53,133 --> 00:01:57,133

It was a little bit behind closed doors
where only a few people had access to it,

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00:01:57,133 --> 00:02:00,266

and my vision really was to
open this up to more people.

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00:02:00,400 --> 00:02:06,783

So Manuella approached us with the project
to see how we could create a more equitable way

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00:02:06,783 --> 00:02:11,550

of distributing Indian instrumental
sounds through sample packs.

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00:02:11,683 --> 00:02:17,050

And one thing that really caught my eye
at the time was a call specifically to do with ED and I.

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00:02:17,550 --> 00:02:20,283

And I think that this
was a perfect fit for the project

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00:02:20,283 --> 00:02:23,449

because what we were trying to do
was to commercialise something

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00:02:23,449 --> 00:02:25,933

scale up the sound archive,

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00:02:25,933 --> 00:02:30,516

but we needed to be very
considerate about the ethical implications of this.

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00:02:30,516 --> 00:02:35,383

A lot of Indian artists have had
that experience of being exploited in the past,

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00:02:35,783 --> 00:02:38,750

so you know, they may be recorded or

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00:02:39,416 --> 00:02:42,949

invited for a live performance,
but not acknowledged and recognised.

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00:02:43,083 --> 00:02:44,300

My name is Jonny Batchelor.

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00:02:44,300 --> 00:02:47,300

I am a twenty seven year old white male.

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00:02:48,233 --> 00:02:51,199

Brown hair, brown beard and glasses.

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00:02:51,199 --> 00:02:56,599

(Indian classical music plays)

41

00:02:56,599 --> 00:03:04,750

I received the original unedited samples from
Manuella from the original recordings back in 2013.

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00:03:06,116 --> 00:03:09,966

My job was really just to sift
through all the unedited samples

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00:03:09,966 --> 00:03:14,016

and edit them down
into more of a sample pack format.

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00:03:14,016 --> 00:03:16,716

(Indian classical music plays)

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00:03:16,716 --> 00:03:17,866

I'm Hayley Suviste

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00:03:17,866 --> 00:03:20,616

I'm the graduate research assistant on this project

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00:03:20,616 --> 00:03:21,900

with Dr Manuella Blackburn.

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00:03:22,383 --> 00:03:24,333

I'm a white woman in my mid-twenties

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00:03:24,333 --> 00:03:26,849

with mid-length wavy blonde hair and blue eyes.

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00:03:27,699 --> 00:03:30,283

So the change that we're
trying to make in this project is

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00:03:30,283 --> 00:03:34,949

to really link this sample pack back
to the musicians themselves and their practise

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00:03:34,949 --> 00:03:37,733

and link them up with the
users that are using the sample pack

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00:03:37,733 --> 00:03:40,233

because usually they're fully disconnected.

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00:03:40,233 --> 00:03:42,516

Hi, my name is Rekesh Chauhan.

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00:03:42,516 --> 00:03:45,050

I'm a British Indian male in my early 30s.

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00:03:45,050 --> 00:03:46,199

I have black hair.

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00:03:46,199 --> 00:03:49,300

I'm clean shaven

and my pronouns are he/him.

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00:03:50,383 --> 00:03:53,533

I primarily play the style of

Indian classical music on the piano.

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00:03:53,533 --> 00:03:56,599

I also play a Indian instrument called the Harmonium.

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00:03:56,599 --> 00:04:02,000

(Harmonium music plays)

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00:04:02,000 --> 00:04:05,349

Because the Harmonium is so widely used.

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00:04:05,349 --> 00:04:08,733

I really wanted to be able to make

sure that the nuances of the Harmonium

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00:04:08,733 --> 00:04:11,949

are captured because

it can be played in so many different styles.

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00:04:11,949 --> 00:04:14,833

(Harmonium music plays)

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00:04:14,833 --> 00:04:19,983

Because in India, the way the instrument is

used itself differs vastly, according to which region.

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00:04:20,699 --> 00:04:24,816

It can be used in classical music,
it can be used in folk or devotional music

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00:04:24,816 --> 00:04:29,966

and primarily as a accompaniment for vocal music.

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00:04:30,766 --> 00:04:35,366

(Sound of sangu being played)

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00:04:35,866 --> 00:04:40,766

So there's been a lot of time spent on
comparing how the conventions of the industry are

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00:04:40,766 --> 00:04:42,283

to how we want them to be.

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00:04:42,283 --> 00:04:48,000

(Sitar music plays)

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00:04:48,000 --> 00:04:51,483

Most times it's the producer that makes
a sample pack that kind of gets all the credit.

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00:04:51,483 --> 00:04:54,933

(Sitar music plays)

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00:04:54,933 --> 00:05:00,316

So for a few artists, we had to really
discuss and explain and and help them

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00:05:00,316 --> 00:05:06,149

see the benefit in this and
why it was intended to be fair and respectful.

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00:05:06,149 --> 00:05:10,199

We've made 'meet the musician'
videos to showcase who our musicians are.

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00:05:10,783 --> 00:05:13,300

And they introduce themselves, their instruments.

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00:05:13,300 --> 00:05:15,149

Hi, my name is Raaheel Husain,

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00:05:15,149 --> 00:05:17,283

and I'm an Indian classical musician based in London.

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00:05:17,800 --> 00:05:20,383

As part of the sample pack,
you'll get to hear me playing the sitar,

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00:05:20,383 --> 00:05:22,083

which is the instrument I have here.

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00:05:22,083 --> 00:05:23,183

And also singing.

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00:05:23,283 --> 00:05:26,100

Like this one is tuned in D.

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00:05:26,100 --> 00:05:29,533

(Sound of tabla being hit)

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00:05:29,533 --> 00:05:33,916

So the musicians have
auditioned all the samples we've made,

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00:05:33,916 --> 00:05:35,983

and they've made decisions about what should go in

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00:05:35,983 --> 00:05:37,866

and what should not go into the sample pack.

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00:05:38,250 --> 00:05:42,516

We've also provided tutorials so that
they can go away and consider making their own.

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00:05:42,516 --> 00:05:45,233

(music plays)

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00:05:45,233 --> 00:05:50,300

We've achieved a lot so far,
but we've also seen how much more we could do.

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00:05:50,300 --> 00:05:55,850

(Harmonium music plays)

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00:05:55,850 --> 00:06:01,333

Sometimes a distributor can host cultural
sound material or culturally diverse material,

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00:06:01,333 --> 00:06:05,066

but it's very difficult to find it
with their search mechanisms.

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00:06:05,066 --> 00:06:06,800

(Harmonium music plays)

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00:06:06,800 --> 00:06:10,566

What the instrument is,
what it sounds like, the scale names

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00:06:10,566 --> 00:06:17,066

and we've tried to facilitate conversations about
what could change in terms of the distributor's website.

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00:06:17,366 --> 00:06:22,949

When I'm playing, usually you have a
rough idea of what you're about to play,

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00:06:23,766 --> 00:06:25,733

but it can change.

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00:06:26,666 --> 00:06:28,899

(Harmonium music plays)

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00:06:28,899 --> 00:06:32,716

You start off with the theme, but depending on the
energy of the musicians that you're playing with as well,

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00:06:32,716 --> 00:06:34,533

depending on what the audience is like.

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00:06:35,366 --> 00:06:36,716

You start to adapt the music.

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00:06:37,283 --> 00:06:40,133

So we've had to really think about the ethics of that

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00:06:40,133 --> 00:06:45,266

and think through how we are
sort of fitting the sound file to a grid.

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00:06:45,266 --> 00:06:51,183

(Harmonium music plays)

106

00:06:51,583 --> 00:06:55,883

I guess with this project, you're trying to
encapsulate all of that into smaller, different samples

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00:06:55,883 --> 00:06:58,883

and saying, actually
the harmony can be played in this style.

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00:06:59,316 --> 00:07:00,850

It be played in this style.

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00:07:01,016 --> 00:07:05,250

So partway through the project,
we released a little taster of our larger sample pack.

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00:07:05,250 --> 00:07:10,300

So this was about 11 sounds that we
released as part of a young creators competition.

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00:07:10,350 --> 00:07:11,733

Hi, I'm Cameron Naylor.

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00:07:11,733 --> 00:07:13,466

I'm a composer and sound artist.

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00:07:13,766 --> 00:07:15,133

My pronouns are he/they

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00:07:15,133 --> 00:07:18,449

I'm a white 21 year old male with long blonde hair.

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00:07:20,100 --> 00:07:25,850

The instruments and samples from around India really interested me compositionally,

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00:07:25,850 --> 00:07:28,816

and so I applied and got the sample packs from that.

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00:07:28,816 --> 00:07:35,649

(Passage by Cameron Naylor playing experimental music made from samples of Indian instruments)

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00:07:35,649 --> 00:07:40,449

The Young Creators Competition was all about getting these sounds out there

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00:07:40,449 --> 00:07:44,399

so that young people had a chance to work with really high quality audio

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00:07:44,399 --> 00:07:46,566

and get to know a bit more about these instruments.

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00:07:46,566 --> 00:07:52,899

(Passage by Cameron Naylor playing experimental music made from samples of Indian instruments)

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00:07:52,899 --> 00:07:56,500

One of the main challenges that I found when composing with these samples

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00:07:56,500 --> 00:08:00,116

was composing with respect to the tradition that they came from.

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00:08:00,116 --> 00:08:03,750

The rhythms and tonality of the instruments.

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00:08:04,116 --> 00:08:06,716

It's something that I wanted to reflect in a piece about India,

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00:08:06,716 --> 00:08:11,416

however, coming from a Western background, my music and composition style

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00:08:11,416 --> 00:08:14,133

was completely different, so we're sort of merging the two worlds.

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00:08:14,133 --> 00:08:21,933

(Passage by Cameron Naylor playing experimental music made from samples of Indian instruments)

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00:08:21,933 --> 00:08:28,283

What we're doing here is at least we are starting to address issues of cultural appropriation

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00:08:28,283 --> 00:08:30,800

of, you know, equality, diversity,

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00:08:30,800 --> 00:08:34,616

of trying to acknowledge the
work that has gone into these sounds.

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00:08:34,899 --> 00:08:39,100

In terms of long term legacy,
we hope to leave an example of good practise.

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00:08:39,549 --> 00:08:43,649

Because sometimes you use samples,
you wish you knew who played it because it sounds great.

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00:08:43,950 --> 00:08:47,733

And hopefully this will sound great
and you will know that it's been played by myself.

135

00:08:48,450 --> 00:08:54,416

Yes so at the moment, we're at the point where we're in
conversation with Loopmasters a sample pack developer.

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00:08:57,733 --> 00:09:08,333

(three individual samples play
featuring tabla, voice, and Sitar)

137

00:09:08,649 --> 00:09:11,116

And this means the end users across the globe

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00:09:11,116 --> 00:09:17,549

can access the Instruments India
sound archive materials as a commercial product.

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00:09:17,850 --> 00:09:21,750

So, you know, a composer or a producer or a student

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00:09:21,750 --> 00:09:25,983

or a young person in school might
not have been to a live performance,

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00:09:25,983 --> 00:09:28,683

but they'll come across this
sample pack of Indian sounds.

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00:09:29,100 --> 00:09:33,283

Maybe they then feel like I can
go and listen to an Indian concert live.

143

00:09:33,283 --> 00:09:37,799

(Indian classical music plays)

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00:09:37,799 --> 00:09:42,000

It's really important that we
recognise the sounds of India.

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00:09:42,000 --> 00:09:45,983

I've had a fabulous time working
on it and I've learnt a lot through this process.

146

00:09:45,983 --> 00:09:49,333

(Indian classical music plays)