



A LIVE WIRE  
OF SOUND  
TECHNOLOGY  
M. JOHN THANKACHAN



That passion still drives him today, as it did when he initially started Torvin Audio System, the brand of audio systems from the house of Power Electronics and Technologies.

The result has to be heard. And we did, on a bright Thursday mid-morning, when we got a grand tour of his audio room on the second floor of his office just off Ritchie street. Try your favourite CD - one you think you know in every tiny detail - and be prepared to be astonished.

Suddenly, we found ourselves listening to a live concert by the legendary KJ Yesudas, whose soulful voice fills the room. Clicking of fingers for taalam and gentle tabla beats drizzle from nowhere. The sitar has somehow acquired a far richer timbre, and the backing instruments are no longer a flat wall of sound, but distinct rhythms. The whole thing sounds so alive, so tactile, so real.

The story of the inception and growth of Power Electronics & Technologies has been strung together note by note, over the past 40 years, by its founder M. John Thankachan.

Thankachan spent his formative years in Kottayam, Poomala and Palakkal, Thrissur. After a diploma in Electronics, he worked at Murphy's Electronics, where he soon was sought after for his knack in fixing gadgets.

He decided to pursue a course in Television and moved to the Madras of the 1980s. And the rest, as it is said, is what he scripted.

He identified the absence of credible service centers that were equipped to fix faults

in expensive, international brands. And so he began, as a hobby, to help people mend their music systems. "Sometimes I would get paid, other times the satisfaction of restoring their equipments would be what I got." Just as Alice did in Wonderland, he took a leap of faith and thus was born Power Electronics & Technologies, hiring 17 employees at that time. Charting the growth of the company, the "Audio Street" (where his office is located) and the surrounding areas have also been developed by him.

He recalls: "My father had a small system at home, so I grew up with a lot of music. I listen to music all the time even now."

Being an audiophile himself, he knew too well how its easy to listen to music but it isn't always as easy to truly hear your favorite songs and get the most out of your audio devices. That plus the deterrent of an inhibitive price tag of a branded system, he didn't want a music connoisseur to miss out on the sheer listening pleasure. This, in particular, is a slippery slope. One of the popular tenet is that the more an audio system costs, the better it is. But Thankachan engineered on to develop world class products, with gold plating, sleek finishes, right down to the velvet control knobs, so that people across all strata have access to audio nirvana.

We then transcended to a fast-paced, peppy 'Macho' number from the movie 'Merasal', one of the many A.R.Rahman and Sid Sriram ventures. Each of the Torvin amplifiers and speakers honed in on an instrumental or vocal tempo. Needless to say, we were enveloped in the pulsating cadence of the song.

A brilliant demonstration in how he removed the sound of the system itself, allowing the real character of the recording to come to the fore. It was as if the artist was let out through the medium, so to speak. "This way any good hi-fi equipment gives you a complete involvement, when the auditory extends to a sensory experience."



His thoughtful and painstaking approach has seen him and his team invest in making good quality, affordable products (at fraction the price of an imported unit) and with the "Make in India" tag. A tag that proudly represents his logo and underpins his quest for perfection in his brand.

Popularly known in the audio circles as the "Father of Indian Audio Industry", the byname conferred on him has been earned based on his penchant for the above three criteria.

The company offers a wide range of in-house designed and manufactured systems. From the cables and amplification, bi-amping sensitivity speakers, right through to the drive units in the loudspeakers, everything is designed and produced by Thankachan.

As a consultant and developer, he also customises to individual budgets, requirements and preferences. His solutions are tailored to the client's expectations. All his products come with complete guarantee of quality and a 10 year warranty.

He's the guy that goes against the grain, has stood conventional wisdom on its head. Thankachan maintains that manual technology is by far superior to today's

digital drive and has fondness for the days of monaural recordings. "Analogue system is any day superior to digital medium, can't compare the two sound qualities."

Thankachan views life through the same lens he approaches work. Pragmatic and straightforward.

A self-taught technocrat, he is diligent in keeping pace with the technological advancements. "I read endlessly and that is my source of knowledge." He updates himself on the latest developments and the impressive stack of magazines line every available space in his office.

He is the most generous with sharing his insights and information. "I am good with correspondence. Any one who writes to me with doubts and clarifications, I am happy to respond. I receive messages from all parts of the world. From my customers to even from my ex-staff members who got a jumpstart into their careers and are well settled now." He has plans to offer workshops and training programs for youngsters.

Since his youth, Thankachan has slowly built a collection of audio gadgets to the impressive mass it is today. From vintage

microphones to vinyl player, his treasure trove spans different eras and categories. He can trace the genealogy of each modern instrument to its ancestor first model. Needless to say, his cache has pride of place in his office. And he maintains them with deep devotion and affection.

Asked about the projections for the future, if he has made provision for carrying on his legacy, "I'm hard wired for the technical side. I don't have the business acumen," he says with a tinge of regret. Although he has many satisfied customers world over, his products don't have a nation level reach as could have been achieved, had he spent time and effort on the marketing aspect. He mentions in passing that he is open to business or marketing partners, or investors.

When many might contemplate retirement, Thankachan shows no signs of slowing down. As if to prove it he, with his R&D team, is still driving the company forward. In the pipeline is, by popular demand, a digital player. It comes with speakers and facilities for pen drive, SD card, convergence and is set to be priced at Rs 20,000 or thereabouts. "Innovate, surmount and develop" are the mantras this Music's Finest Conductor has lived his life by. And it is no exaggeration to say that John Thankachan is a well-known and respected name in the field of audio systems. He has

received many awards and recognitions for his contributions.

Science is the rhythm of his life. His inventive mind is full of pre-vision ideas to make his brand of difference to peoples lives. And we at Champions of Chennai can think of no one more fitting for our Science Champion award.

"We should develop the mindset to support the local economy whenever possible and I see that most people here automatically look to Japanese, British and American branded items that are nowadays wholly built in China. We have many homemade alternatives. I would love to generate interest in Made in India items as I truly believe we have a great ear for music and are quite intelligent enough to come up with gear that rival the best in the world. I see no dearth of enthusiasm in the pursuit of audio nirvana among Indian audiophiles in comparison to any other audiophile in the world."

His thought provoking words echos well down the lanes and by lanes of Ritchie street.

*For more details, email: [audio@torvin.com](mailto:audio@torvin.com)*

*Or visit [www.torvin.com](http://www.torvin.com)*

*If you are keen on chatting with him in person, call on 044-28587256 or 988400 22522 or 97899 85593, before you sound off with him at 9/4 Seeyaliamman Kovil Street.*

