

# How a basketball became a featured instrument in a Sting song

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A colleague of mine told a story of his first job. He worked for a company that made music synthesizers, and he was assigned the task of building a sound effects library. For one of their recording sessions, they went to a local gym and recorded, among other things, the sound of my colleague bouncing a basketball on the floor of the gym.

They labelled the sound *Basketball*.

They also labelled it *West African tribal drum*.

If you bought the sound effects library and played the the basketball sound, and then played the West African tribal drum sound, and if you paid enough attention, you would have recognized that they were the same thing.

On the other hand, since this sound effects library had 10,000 sounds on it, you were unlikely to notice the duplicate.

Time passes, and my colleague hears this new song on the radio. *Englishman in New York* by Sting. And he hears his basketball. “Oh my God, I’ve just played on this Sting song.”

But wait, the story isn’t over.

About six months later, the company held a big fancy launch event, Sting was performing at the product launch as a satisfied customer of their product.

All the employees were hanging out in the VIP Lounge. My colleague was at the bar ordering a drink, and who should walk up to the bar next to him but Sting himself, getting a drink of his own.

My colleague said, “Hey, Sting. Did you know that I provided the sample of that West African tribal drum that you used in *Englishman in New York*?”

Sting looked over at him, looked him up and down, and silently turned and walked away.

Brush with greatness.

Raymond Chen

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