



The New York Public Library
Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound

Guide to the

Irving Teibel papers

1950-2011

*L (Special) 18-4

Processed by Matthew Snyder, 2018.

Summary

Creator: Teibel, Irving

Title: Irving Teibel papers

Date: 1950-2011

Size: 4.83 linear feet (13 containers)

Abstract: Irving Teibel (1938-2010) was a sound engineer and photographer, best known for his field recordings of natural sounds which he released as the *Environments* series of long-playing records on his own Syntonic Research Inc. label. Teibel's papers, dating from the 1950s to 2011, document his work as a sound engineer, business owner, and photographer/designer. They consist of audio recordings, the files of Syntonic Research Inc., and Teibel's photography and designs.

Conditions Governing Access:

Audio recordings are unavailable pending digitization.

Preferred citation: Irving Teibel papers, Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Matthew Snyder, 2018.

Creator History

Irving Teibel (1938-2010) was a sound engineer and photographer, best known for his field recordings of natural sounds which he released as the *Environments* series of long-playing records.

Born in Buffalo, New York, Teibel studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology, the Cooper Union, and The Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. After his schooling, he served in the U.S. Army from 1962 to 1964 as a public information specialist, stationed in Stuttgart, Germany. During his work at radio stations, he became interested in recording technology and the manipulation of tape.

Teibel later recounted that he studied electronic music with the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen during his military service. Following his discharge, Teibel lived in London from 1964 to 1965, and worked in advertising.

Teibel returned to the United States in 1965 and settled in New York City. He first worked as a freelance photographer and designer, as well as a studio manager for the photographer Bert Stern. Later, he was hired as a photographer and photo editor for Ziff Davis Publications, which published *Popular Photography* and *Car and Driver*. His work was featured in both magazines, and he wrote for *Popular Photography* as well. In his spare time, Teibel continued to study electronic music at the New School.

In 1968, Teibel was assisting a friend, the filmmaker and musician Tony Conrad, with the soundtrack for his film *Coming Attractions* by making recordings of the ocean at Coney Island. The experience inspired Teibel to use natural sounds to mask unwanted noise, and he immediately thought of releasing recordings of such "psychoacoustic" sounds commercially. He began creating high-quality field recordings of ocean surf, rainstorms, thunderstorms, country environments, sailing, and other natural sounds. Teibel then partnered with Louis Gerstman, a neuropsychologist who specialized in sound and speech processing, to form a company, Syntonic Research, Inc. to market and distribute the recordings.

Gerstman assisted Teibel in processing the raw recordings of ocean tides with an IBM 360 computer. After extensive editing, processing, and mixing, the first long-playing record in the *Environments* series, *Psychologically Ultimate Seashore*, was released in late 1969. Teibel designed the LP album covers, took his own photographs, and wrote the liner notes.

The series was an immediate success, and subsequent issues were distributed through Atlantic Records. These included *Optimum Aviary*, *Dawn At New Hope*, *Ultimate Thunderstorms*, *Wind In The Trees*, *A Country Stream*, and *English Meadow*, among others. A total of 22 albums were released in the series over a period of 10 years. For much of this time, Teibel worked out of an office on the top floor of the Flatiron building. Syntonic Research also released an album of the keyboardist Raymond Erickson performing Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical piano works on synthesizer and harpsichord, as well as a re-publication of an 1895 reference book, *The Complete Compendium of Universal Knowledge*.

In addition to his work with Syntonic Research, Teibel created an environmental sound installation for the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (1970), and taught a class in experimental recording techniques at the New School (1971). In 1973, Teibel edited a recording of Richard Nixon's August 15th "Second Watergate" speech to make it sound as if Nixon was admitting to having prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in of 1972. "The Altered Nixon Speech" was a hit single and boosted Teibel's reputation as a specialist in magnetic tape technology. He was later called as an expert witness in high-profile criminal proceedings.

In 1981, Teibel moved with his wife to Austin, Texas, where they raised two daughters, and where he continued to run Syntonic Research from his home. He died in 2010 at the age of 72.

Scope and Content Note

The Irving Teibel papers, dating from the 1950s to 2011, document Teibel's work as a sound engineer, business owner, and photographer/designer. They consist of audio recordings, files from the offices of Syntonic Research, Inc., and Teibel's photography and designs.

Series I, Audio Recordings, comprises the bulk of the collection. They mainly hold Teibel's field

recordings of natural and artificial sounds, some of which formed the basis for the *Environments* series of albums released on Syntonic Research. Other recordings which never saw commercial release include urban sounds of New York City, high-performance race cars, children at play, carnivals, parades, and natural sounds in other countries. Also present are interviews with Teibel; recordings of Teibel's compositions and sound experiments; interviews with Teibel; and lectures by the neuropsychologist Louis Gerstman. Audio recordings are unavailable pending digitization.

Series II, Syntonic Research Inc. Files, documents the distribution, marketing, and promotion of the company's products, primarily the *Environments* series. It also holds files on Teibel's other work and interests, including photography and his ideas for the advancement of recording technology and hi-fidelity sound reproduction. The series includes correspondence, business files, contracts, advertising and promotional literature, and transcripts of interviews with Teibel.

Series III, Photography and Designs, contains Teibel's professional work of the mid to late-1960s and his work for the Syntonic Research album covers, as well as his designs for magazine covers and interior spreads.

Key Terms

Subjects

Acoustical engineering
Ambient sounds
City sounds
Sasquatch

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Business records
Clippings (information artifacts)
Commercial correspondence
Contracts
Field recordings
Personal correspondence
Photographs
Sound recordings

Names

Erickson, Raymond
Teibel, Irving
Syntonic Research Inc.

Container List

Series I: Audio Recordings 1966-1995

The audio recordings date from 1966 to 1995. Arranged alphabetically by title or subject, the bulk of them consists of field recordings, some of which were source material for the *Environments* series released on Syntonic Research. These include such sounds as rain, thunder, insects, ocean surf, streams, wind, birds, frogs, rain forests, swamps, ski slopes, meadows, sail boats, and heartbeats, as well as several of the Be-In events in Central Park. Most of these were recorded in the northeastern United States, but some were recorded in England, Peru, and Puerto Rico. Teibel also recorded urban sounds, such as the Flatiron, West Village, and Lower East side neighborhoods of New York City; traffic; subway trains; steam trains; race cars (some at Watkins Glen Raceway); motorboats; airplanes; children at play; and carnivals.

Also present are Teibel's experiments with sound composition and synthesizers; radio interviews of Teibel; Teibel's edits of a speech by Richard Nixon; Teibel's children as infants; performances by the pianist/scholar Raymond Erickson released on Syntonic Research; performances of the music of Kirk Nurock; lectures by the neuropsychologist Louis Gerstman; the Apollo 15 mission (recorded off of television broadcasts); copies of a recording of Robert Kennedy's assassination; and an alleged recording of Bigfoot. In addition, the collection contains safety copies of mixed (but not mastered) tapes of some Syntonic Research releases.

Audio recordings are unavailable pending digitization.

b. 1 f. 1 Tape Inserts 1971-1983

Series II: Syntonic Research Inc. Files 1950s-2011 (7 containers 2.54 linear feet)

The Syntonic Research Inc. Files mainly document the distribution, marketing, and promotion of the company's products, primarily the *Environments* series of albums, but also including *The Altered Nixon Speech*, *The Erickson Tapes*, and the book *The Complete Compendium of Universal Knowledge*. These files also contain information about Teibel's other interests and activities, such as his photography business; his exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts; his friends the neuropsychologist Louis Gerstman and the composer R. Murray Schafer; and his other ideas for innovation in the use of tape, hi-fi stereo equipment, and photography.

The files hold notes and writings by Teibel; business and personal correspondence; contracts and correspondence with Atlantic Records; advertising copy; marketing ideas; promotional literature and designs; press releases; clippings; listener surveys; listener letters; copyright forms; biographies of Teibel; and transcripts of interviews with Teibel and his daughter, Jennifer Ballow. The original arrangement of these files was retained.

- b. 1 f. 2 Marketing 1969-1978
- b. 1 f. 3 Promotional Material 1970-1986
- b. 2 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 4 Uses circa 1970
- b. 1 f. 5-6 Press Releases 1970-1995
- b. 1 f. 7 Fact Sheets on Environments 1980s
- b. 1 f. 8 Biographies of Irving Teibel 1969, 1988
- b. 3 f. 1 Logos 1970s-1980s
- b. 3 f. 2-3 Quotes from Customers 1977, 1988
- b. 3 f. 4 Louis Gerstman 1992
- b. 3 f. 5 Comment Cards and Letters 1972-1999
- b. 3 f. 6 Survey Results 1984
- b. 3 f. 7 Listening Test Surveys 1976-1983
- b. 3 f. 8 Clippings 1975-1995
- b. 4 f. 1
- b. 3 f. 9 Catalog Mentions 1976-1991
- b. 5 f. 1 Newsletter 1974

Series II: Syntonic Research Inc. Files (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 2 Nippon Phonogram 1976-1981
- b. 5 f. 3 *The Erickson Tapes* 1973-1974
- b. 5 f. 4 Copyrights and Trademarks 1970-1986, 1987
- b. 5 f. 5 Business Plan 1985-1993
- b. 5 f. 6 The Lou Gordon Program 1973
- b. 5 f. 7-8 Atlantic Records 1970-2008
- b. 5 f. 9 "*An Essay on the Environments Series*" 1981
- b. 5 f. 10 Interviews with Irving Teibel and Jennifer Ballow 1987, circa 2010
- b. 5 f. 11 R. Murray Schafer 1977-1987
Contains correspondence between Schafer and Teibel, and an interview with Schafer.
- b. 5 f. 12-14 Customer Correspondence 1970-2002
Inquiries from individuals and organizations, some with responses from Teibel.
- b. 6 f. 1 Wholesale Retail Sales Correspondence 1979-1993
- b. 2 f. 2 *The Altered Nixon Speech* 1973-1974
- b. 6 f. 2 Contains press releases, clippings, letters of inquiry from listeners and retailers, and advertisements.
- b. 6 f. 3 Tim Wilson / Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1974, 1978
- b. 6 f. 4 Ivan Mogull Music Corporation 1977
- b. 6 f. 5 Tony Schwartz / Folkways 1950s
- b. 6 f. 6 Conceptual Notes 1960s-1975
- b. 6 f. 7 Albums 1 and 2 1969
Press releases and ad copy regarding *The Ultimate Seashore* and *Tintinnabulation*.
- b. 6 f. 8 *The Ultimate Heartbeat* 1974-1975
- b. 6 f. 9 Museum of Contemporary Crafts Exhibit 1970
- b. 6 f. 10 *The Complete Compendium of Universal Knowledge* 1973-1976
- b. 6 f. 11 Bigfoot 1973, 1995
Contains notes and analysis of a claimed recording of Bigfoot.
The recording and analysis were sent by the recording's creator, Alan R. Berry, requesting that Teibel analyze the recording as well; there is no evidence of a response from Teibel.
- b. 6 f. 12 Ideas and Proposals 1975, 1983, 1996
Includes Teibel's ideas regarding photography, magnetic tape, and audio equipment, and a Guggenheim Foundation application.
- b. 6 f. 13 Voyager Spacecraft 1977, 2011
Contains a press release from Syntonic Research announcing that *Environments* excerpts would be included on the Voyager golden records. Also present is an email exchange between Miriam Berman and Carl Sagan productions regarding the inclusion of Teibel's recordings on the record. The Sagan company replied that they were not included.
- b. 6 f. 14 Westbeth Artists Community 1970, 1979-1980
- b. 7 f. 1 Clippings 1975-1995
- b. 7 f. 2 *Days of Heaven* 1978
A film which included Syntonic Research recordings.
- b. 7 f. 3 Photography Business 1967-1969

Series III: Photography and Designs early 1960s - 1981 (9 containers 3.17 linear feet)

The photography consists of Teibel's freelance and magazine work of the mid-1960s, imagery taken for Syntonic Research album covers, and photographs taken for his own edification. Arranged by subject or use, most of the series consists of slides, but prints, negatives, and contact sheets are also present. The series includes work for *Car and Driver* and *Popular Photography* magazines; models clothed and nude, some with experimental lighting effects; animals; fashion shoots; portraits; bodies in motion; still lifes; and stock photography work such as men playing tennis and romantic couples. The series also holds portraits of Teibel, images of Teibel's family, travel photos, abstract imagery, and clippings from magazines featuring Teibel's photography and writing.

Also present are covers and interior designs Teibel created for magazines, not all of which were published. They include drawings and photography outlines for *Photography* magazine.

Photography

- b. 7 f. 4 Abstracts 1972
- b. 7 f. 5 Animals 1977-1981
- b. 7 f. 6 Army Calendar early 1960s
- b. 7 f. 7 Art Paintings 1960s-1970s
- b. 7 f. 8 Bodies in Motion 1979
- b. 7 f. 9 *Car and Driver* 1971
- b. 7 f. 10 Cars, Fish, and Saxophonist 1971-1979
- b. 7 f. 11 Couple at the Beach 1977
- b. 8 f. 1 Couple at Outdoor Table 1970s
- b. 8 f. 2 Erickson, Raymond 1974
- b. 8 f. 3-4 Experimental 1972-1978
- b. 8 f. 5 Fashion 1960s
- b. 8 f. 6 Man and Child 1978
- b. 8 f. 7 Men Playing Tennis 1970s
- b. 8 f. 8 Models 1968
- b. 8 f. 9 Nudes mid-1960s - 1978
- b. 8 f. 10 Nude Children Playing 1977
- b. 2 f. 3-4 Portraits 1966-1981
- b. 4 f. 2-4
- b. 8 f. 11-12
- b. 9 f. 1-7
- b. 2 f. 5 Still Lifes 1978
- b. 9 f. 8-10
- b. 10 f. 1-4 Syntonic Research Album Art 1960s-1970s
- b. 11 f. 1
- b. 11 f. 2 Syntonic Research Studio and Equipment 1974-1981
- b. 2 f. 6 Teibel, Irving 1960s-1980s
- b. 4 f. 5 Portraits and self-portraits.
- b. 11 f. 3-5
- b. 11 f. 6 Travel 1964-1981
- b. 12 f. 1-2
- b. 12 f. 3 Women in Nature / Experimental 1960s-1970s
- b. 2 f. 7 Designs, Art, and Clippings 1966-1974
- b. 12 f. 4
- b. 13 f. 1-2