

Records to Be Heard, Rather Than Listened To: How Irv Teibel Polished and Preserved that “Raw Diamond,” Mother Nature’s Soundtrack

Irv Teibel (1938-2010) was the producer, sound recordist, and entrepreneur behind Syntonic Research, Inc., the record label responsible for the influential Environments series (1969-1979) and “The Altered Nixon Speech” (1973). The Environments series was the first widely available psychoacoustic recording series that attempted to use natural soundscapes to alter psychological states, aid concentration levels, mask unwanted noise, and provide other therapeutic benefits to listeners. “The Altered Nixon Speech” edited President Richard Nixon’s denials of involvement in the Watergate scandal into a detailed confession. Today, Teibel’s daughter manages the Irv Teibel Archive in Austin, Texas.

In Season 6 Episode 3 of HBO’s *Sex and the City*, Carrie Bradshaw is just getting to know potential boyfriend Jack Berger, a motorcycle-riding fellow author carrying a lot of baggage yet from his ex – including the Sharper Image sound machine said ex once gifted him. The first time Carrie spends the night at Jack’s place, she struggles to fall asleep to his preferred “nature noises” soundtrack, complete with calling birds and croaking frogs. It’s not until Carrie replaces Jack’s machine with one that plays the softer sounds of crashing waves that she finds any peace. While the show never explicitly makes this connection, sound recording enthusiasts know that the episode is a nod to the work of psychoacoustic recording pioneer Irv Teibel, without whom all of New York City might still be trying to fall asleep to the “nature noises” soundtrack of honking horns, speeding cars, and voices on the street.

It all goes back to 1968, when Irv Teibel was employed as a sound designer for musician and friend Tony Conrad’s film *Coming Attractions*. Inspired by Walter de Maria’s *Ocean Music*, which featured twenty minutes of recorded ocean sounds, Teibel created his own version of de Maria’s track by recording the ocean at Coney Island with an Uher stereo reel-to-reel tape recorder. On playback, the recording was so compelling that Teibel returned to the seashore dozens of times (and not just at Coney Island, but New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Virginia),¹ eventually capturing on magnetic tape more than 200 hours of white-capped surf breaking over rocks, tides rising and receding, and wind as it whooshed through water. Normally, listening to his recordings on repeat drove Teibel crazy, but this time he thought he might be on to something novel, even useful. Recognizing the recordings’ potential to mask noise and positively affect mood,² Teibel decided to form a business around these “instant environments” designed to be “heard, rather than listened to.”³ He invited Conrad to join in his venture. When Conrad declined, Teibel left the film project in pursuit of a wild new passion that his family and friends considered different at best and bonkers at worst.

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The business-slash-record label that resulted from this leap of faith, called Syntonic Research, Inc., would, with Teibel at its helm, go on to produce eleven LPs of recorded nature sounds ranging in scope from a howling alpine blizzard to insects chirping in the Okefenokee Swamp at dawn, and which were collectively known as the *Environments* series. These records held their own in stores that emphasized pop and would eventually be picked up for distribution by Atlantic Records, leading Teibel to describe his “happy accident” (to borrow a phrase from Teibel’s contemporary, Bob Ross) as “akin to walking down a road and stumbling over a seemingly random stone, only to discover it to be a raw diamond.”⁴ Through it all, Syntonic Research, Inc. would more or less remain the one-man show it began as, with Teibel himself conceiving of, recording, editing, and producing each new record, right down to designing the cover art and writing the liner notes.

How did this happen?

By his own admission, Irv Teibel (born Irving Solomon Teibel to Russian immigrant parents in Buffalo, New York, 1938) was both an eccentric and a perfectionist, “obsessed” from a young age with sound and its ability to be recorded and manipulated. As a teenager, he took a recording device to his brother Phil’s violin concerts and taped them so he could add the tapes to the shelves of classical music already lining his family home.⁵ Around that same time, Teibel was diagnosed with a hyperactivity disorder.⁶ Later, he studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology and the Art Center of Design in Pasadena, famously “stilling the devils in his head”⁷ by listening to Gregorian chants while doing homework, before serving as a public information specialist with the US Army in Stuttgart, Germany. There, Teibel became a night DJ at a local radio station, where he experimented with electronic music and *musique concrète*, temporarily returning to his first love of sound.⁸ Back in the Big Apple, he honed all three talents while working as a photographer and layout specialist for *Popular Photographer* and *Car and Driver* magazines and continuing to dabble in ambient noise recordings, mostly for personal pleasure as he attempted to mask the city’s endless thrum. That’s when Teibel partnered with Tony Conrad to record the ocean at Coney Island, and today, the rest is history. In the late 1960s and ‘70s, though, what Teibel managed to pull off was groundbreaking.

It was the era of free love and freer thinking, when Americans were eager to abandon the old ways of their forebears and were hungry for whatever promised to expand minds, hearts, and in the case of a few enterprising capitalists, wallets. Timothy Leary had just been fired from Harvard for purportedly pressuring students to participate in LSD experiments. Hypnosis was all the rage when it came to curing alcohol and drug addiction and other psychological afflictions. (And what hypnosis couldn’t fix, Valium, the best-selling brand pharmaceutical in the western world throughout the 1970s, promised to.⁹) Yoga and Ram Dass were on the brink of becoming household names. At the same time, improvements to HVAC systems were eliminating – to disastrous effect, as it turned out – the “white noise hum” then common to corporate offices. Once it was determined that white noise can in fact “enhance the work efficiency and reduce the work pressure of [an otherwise] low-noise environment,”¹⁰ research into noise-masking began trending. It was on this New Age, sound-savvy wave that Teibel rode his way to the top of the as-yet relatively unknown field of psychoacoustics.

Psychoacoustics studies the physical and psychological effects of sound on biological organisms. It’s not limited to the mechanics of hearing, but considers how what is heard gets interpreted by the brain, and what the brain then does with that information.¹² Teibel’s

own research into the effects of his recordings on listeners – something he studied at length and in detail, continually making adjustments to the sounds as he went – revealed, for example, a several-fold increase in Alpha wave patterns in the brains of his subjects after or upon exposure to certain tracks in the *Environments* series. Alpha waves are the normal electrical activity of the brain when conscious and relaxed, signified by oscillations (alpha waves) with a frequency of 7 to 13 hertz.¹³

Almost immediately, some doctors, hypnotherapists, and even rehab facilities began incorporating Teibel's recordings into treatment plans for their patients to profound effect. "People think they need drugs and alcohol to relax," Teibel observed. "[Substance abuse] clinics provide their patients with alternatives [and we're] one of those alternatives."¹⁴ Psychiatrists played the records in waiting rooms, clergy used them as background sounds for sermons, and preschool teachers relied on the sounds to lull kids to sleep at nap time. Researchers studying childhood hyperactivity disorders even found, to Teibel's lasting gratification, that prescribing *Environments* was its own kind of effective treatment. Exactly *why* the *Environments* series has this effect remains open to debate, though environmental scientists suggest natural sounds "evoke a sense of safety rooted in our prehistoric days, when burbling brooks and talkative birds were a sign that all was well at home."¹⁵

For his initial litmus test, Teibel collected feedback from focus groups primarily composed of college students. They were "astonished," Teibel wrote, "by their newfound ability to concentrate in noisy dorm conditions." Teibel's business associates likewise spoke of "their reduced tension, the wonderful sleep they had experienced," endorsements that prompted Teibel to share his work with a larger audience.¹⁶ Once his recordings became more widely available, the recordist continued to solicit constructive criticism via "feedback cards" included in the album sleeves that listeners were encouraged to fill out and submit. Of their own volition, more than 250,000 listeners did just that.¹⁷ Their comments, making up the bulk of Teibel's "market research," surely influenced both future recordings and revisions to old favorites.

The first record in the *Environments* series, *Environments 1*, consisted of two tracks, one thirty-minute track per side, as would all subsequent installments in the series. On Side A was "Psychologically Ultimate Seashore," the result of more than a year's work spent editing his 200+ hours of recorded ocean sounds into a single looping track.¹⁸ On Side B was "Optimum Aviary," a recording of a bird enclosure at the Bronx Zoo. Interestingly, even though the "final" (used in quotation marks here since Teibel would continue to tinker with these tracks and others long after their initial release) product sounds quite pure, as though Side A is nothing but the unadulterated sounds of one ocean as captured during one hour on one day and Side B is but a faithful accounting of every bird call as it was uttered, we know that not to be the case. In actuality, "pure" sounds uninterrupted by manmade or even other natural intrusions are hard to come by in nature. (Once, a Boy Scout troop came marching across the remote sand dunes dotting North Carolina's seashore, where Teibel was attempting to record.) *Environments 1* therefore utilized the most cutting-edge technology of the day to first isolate and then recombine particular frequencies of sound "scrubbed free of machines, people, and other hassles of civilization,"¹⁹ with future tracks being produced using a combination of controlled staging techniques and custom equipment made-to-order for Teibel.

The version of "Psychologically Ultimate Seashore" available through Spotify today began on Coney Island but was really born in New Jersey's Bell Labs. Another of Teibel's

friends, a Bell Labs neuropsychologist by the name of Lou Gerstman, had lately revolutionized speech synthesis, having helped to create the technology behind the earliest known recording of a computer-synthesized singing voice. Critically, Gerstman had access to an IBM 360 computer, industry standard for business and scientific applications. (To be fair, it could still only hold three minutes of recording time, challenging its users to get creative with editing short takes into a usable half-hour master recording.) Teibel and Gerstman fed forty seconds of Teibel’s recordings into the machine, looped the segment, and manipulated it,²⁰ adjusting equalization settings and compressing dynamic range, adding new synthetic waves via a random noise generator and even a brief clip of Teibel’s own voice making a vowel sound played backwards,²¹ until they hit upon something that sounded even better than the original recording – that is, *more real than real*. This was important, since almost everyone knows what the ocean “should” sound like, setting a high bar for Teibel to get it right. When Syntonic Research, Inc. released the track as “Psychologically Ultimate Seashore” in September 1969, Teibel’s and Gerstman’s mediated ocean loop became one of the first electronically-processed recordings commercially available to the public, notable because it could be played at turntable speeds from 45 rpm down to 16 2/3 rpm and still sound “correct.” When it then sold astronomically well, the album not only proved Irv Teibel’s early detractors wrong, but set in motion the rest of his career.

Before landing on Syntonic Research, Inc., Teibel considered as many as twenty different names for his company, ranging from the straightforward “Audio Environments” to the more esoteric “Sanctum Sanctorum,” Latin for “Holy of Holies.”²² *Syntonic*, a psychological term meaning “tuned into” or “in tune” with one’s environments,²³ seemed to Teibel to combine the mysticism of the latter with the accessibility of the former, while the addition of *Research* loaned the company a decidedly scientific bent. Indeed, the name conjures images of white coats in a sterile lab ... an apt analogy, perhaps, to the precision with which Teibel first accumulated sounds – the “data” – then dissected them. In place of microscopes and scalpels, he had microphones and razor blades (used to cut lengths of tape). Like a scientist, he was forever on the hunt for truth, but only so that he could, in his own words, then “modify and retouch the truth to conform to an inner need” – that of distilling beauty from chaos.

After graduating from his trusty Uher stereo reel-to-reel tape recorder, Teibel added to his sound-capturing arsenal a Stellavox SP7 tape recorder, a Schoeps condenser microphone, and a Sony C22 condenser microphone. These supplemented more nontraditional equipment, like the stethoscope Teibel used to amplify the sound of a human heartbeat on “Ultimate Heartbeat” (1974) or the motion picture equipment he used for its audio capabilities. Later, he traveled to Switzerland to have a one-off recorder made to his specifications. “Summer Cornfield” (1976), a track found on *Environments 7* that features the cicadas and grasshoppers of a Vermont field enhanced with a synthesizer, was produced using a tape recorder that operated at thirty inches per second – two times the speed of ordinary professional tape recorders. Teibel himself was even known to alter equipment to enable mixed quadraphonic encoding, a feature not many devices offered at the time.

For editing, transferring, and mastering, Teibel variously depended on a 3M 16-track recorder, a Studer tape recorder, a Neumann lathe system with Ortofon cartridge, a DBX noise reduction system, and an EML synthesizer, in addition to that old standby, a 360-series computer. Regardless of how much processing the recordings underwent in his “lab,” key to Teibel’s methodology was that they were almost always recorded “on-site” or “in the field.” “Country Stream” (1974), a highly edited thirty-minute recording of water



Figure 1: Irv Teibel posing for an early shot in the field with his Stellavox Portable Reel-to-Reel Tape Recorder, 1969.

flowing over rocks, was captured at an undisclosed location in Stockbridge, Massachusetts (Teibel said in press releases that he wanted to keep the exact location a “company secret”), while “Okefenokee Swamp” (1974) was recorded on location in Georgia. Anyone who doubted the veracity of this account had only to ask the family dog, a Schnauzer named Max who was so well-trained not to make any noise when his master was working that he was allegedly almost eaten by an alligator on this outing!

What sounds he could not edit into submission, Teibel attempted to control via staging, to sometimes effective and sometimes hilariously disastrous results. One time, hoping to isolate the sound of crickets from other chirping, buzzing insects, he purchased 10,000 live crickets to record on a sound stage. This was a failed experiment, as Teibel didn’t realize that crickets only sound their mating call at certain times of the year – leaving him with a room full of 10,000 silent crickets! More successful was the stormy night he set up his recording equipment in his Manhattan bathroom, eager, after several disappointing attempts, to capture the powerful sounds of pounding rain and crashing thunder. What he hadn’t been able to pick up in the field, he triumphantly recorded from the dry, warm confines of his shower, a microphone held up to the open window. Such methods may have been unorthodox, but insofar as they gave Teibel the effect he was looking for – reducing stress, while strengthening concentration, meditation, and sex²⁴ – nothing was off-limits. He’d try anything to get it right, and when he did, his listeners couldn’t get enough!

“Fabulous in every aspect,” one 18-year-old student said. “It calms anxiety. It creates space that isn’t there. Food tastes better!,” another claimed. A 44-year-old listener in Spain used *Environments* to suppress chronic pain, while a Mississippi TV producer used it “for

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Lamaze birthing of a baby.”²⁵ Again and again, listeners reported feeling “comforted” by the track – a novel effect, since as Teibel himself noted, “Ambient sounds around us may be syrupy sweet like Muzak or raucous like rock or TV sound, but they are rarely comforting.”²⁶ Cultural elites may have decried this sort of listening as “distracted” or “deconcentrated,” but as critic Paul Williams reminds us, “The experience of music is not fully in the ears. . . . A piece of music happens to a man.”²⁷ What “happened” to Teibel’s consumers was, in the words of music and sociology professor Tia DeNora, an “an opportunity to structure the parameters of action.”²⁸ *Environments* loaned structure and definition to listeners’ lives. The tracks were conclusively *useful*, a goal Teibel had set for himself and his work early on.

Teibel, on the other hand, rarely expressed satisfaction with his recordings. Mike Powell, writing for *Pitchfork Magazine*, said Teibel “seems to have been pathologically incapable of relaxing.” The recordist took suggestions and criticism from listener feedback cards seriously and was always re-working one track or another. It didn’t matter how small or seemingly insignificant a piece of feedback was; if enough listeners commented on it, Teibel figured they must be right, and did whatever it took to bring his recordings closer to perfect. “I am hardly an efficiency expert,” he commented. “I deal with problems that obsess me.”²⁹ Feedback cards for the 1970 track “Dawn at New Hope, PA,” for example, indicated that one bird on the recording produced a complex, high-frequency sound that the average record player could not track. To fix this, Teibel edited the second half of the grackle’s call each time it occurred, necessitating approximately 300 meticulous cuts. Painstaking, yes – but unquestionably essential in Teibel’s eyes, since they were essential to his audience’s ears.

Irv Teibel wasn’t solely a sound artist. He was also a natural businessman, skilled at selling his creations to the masses. His background in art led him to design the *Environments* album covers himself, all of which embodied the same general aesthetic. The front of each album was dominated by a rectangular photographic image, one Teibel had taken and that corresponded to that album’s theme. Emblazoned across the top was the word “environments” in a Bauhaus-inspired typeface, followed by the series’ tagline “totally new concepts in sound.” From the back of the earliest album covers screamed bright, colorful quotes that promised consumers the aural experience awaiting them worked “better than a tranquilizer” (quotes perhaps spuriously attributed to listeners, though whether Teibel wrote the testimonies himself has never been conclusively proven). The backs also tended to include Teibel’s claim that “The music of the future isn’t music,” but rather the recorded sounds housed within an *Environments* record sleeve. Later covers included blurbs from respected publications like *LIFE Magazine*, which called the *Environments* series “better than booze and safer than pot,”³⁰ or *Newsweek*’s proclamation that Teibel’s work was a “sonic tonic.”³¹

Once Teibel was happy with his designs, he packaged each early pressing himself and hand-delivered them to the retail outlets willing to carry his records. At first, these were targeted, carefully chosen outfits, like the co-op bookstore at Harvard University, nicknamed “The Coop.” The Coop housed one of the largest and most eclectic record stores in the Boston area and was frequented by music lovers of every kind, not just students of Harvard. As word-of-mouth spread, though, and the records started selling so quickly Teibel couldn’t keep them in stock, this “music of the future” drew the attention of record label Atlantic Records, owned by Warner Music Group. In the 1970s, Atlantic was busy moving away from its jazz and soul roots toward more rock and pop music, having recently signed bands like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Led Zeppelin, and Yes. *Environments*

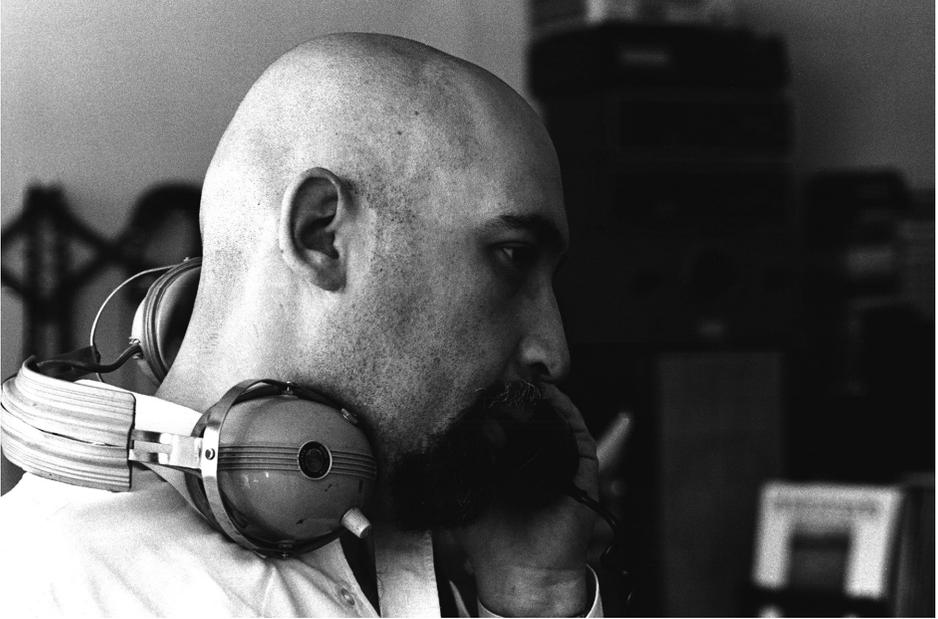


Figure 2: Irv Teibel taking a call in Syntonic Research, Inc.'s Flatiron Building office, 1970s.

represented a stark departure for the record label yet again, but in the end, they were in the business of making money – and Teibel's records made money. A number of his releases went Gold, moving more than 500,000 copies apiece.³² At the height of Syntonic Research, Inc.'s success, Teibel maintained an office on the top floor of the iconic Flatiron Building in lower Manhattan, plus distribution facilities in New Jersey and Austin, Texas.

Around 1981, Teibel moved the SR headquarters to Austin full time, in part to be near research facilities at the University of Texas, but also to start a family. Like many New Yorkers who'd fled the city following the nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island in March 1979, he was looking for a safer, more stable region to call home. After reading an article that named Austin one of the top towns in America in which to raise kids, it was off to Texas for Teibel, where he eventually married and had two daughters. According to his eldest daughter Jennifer, Texas fit Teibel well, and he, it. "Dad had an infatuation with the myth of the urban cowboy," she says, laughing. "He always wore this leather jacket and a really big cowboy hat."³³ Jennifer runs the Irv Teibel Archive in Austin today.

As time went on and tastes changed, consumer interest in *Environments* did not. Teibel chalked his records' enduring success up to the fact that nature has nothing to do with taste



Figure 3: Irv Teibel as a classic "urban cowboy," Austin, Texas.

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because it is universally enjoyed. *Environments*’s natural sounds are timeless, or possibly even, as music historian Victor Szabo points out, “outside human time.”³⁴ Thus, as the record gave way to the cassette and the compact disc, and Teibel re-mastered his original recordings for these new mediums, his work found favor with a whole new generation. While he stopped producing new work, Teibel continued to run a mail-order business from his house until his death from cancer in 2010.

Between 1970 and 1979, Syntonic Research, Inc. released ten more LPs in the *Environments* series, all numbered sequentially and all distributed by Atlantic Records. *Environments 2* (1970) features “Tintinnabulation,” a sequence of computer-generated bell sounds, on Side A, while Side B of that record, titled “Dawn at New Hope, PA” was again recorded “in the field” and presents a chorus of owls, crows, doves, insects, dogs, and geese as they sounded one morning in June 1969. Victor Szabo explains how the “unpulsed, languorous bells” of “Tintinnabulation” “are not nature sounds per se, but their sounds, often played by the wind as by people, do symbolize a proximity to ‘nature’ not enjoyed by most urban or suburban dwellers.”³⁵ Other entries in the series variously highlight the sounds of an anti-war protest in Central Park (“Be-in,” 1971), thunder, lightning, and a torrential downpour (“Ultimate Thunderstorm,” 1974), a stethoscope heartbeat recording (“Ultimate Heartbeat,” 1974), male and female singers intoning an “Om” chant (“Intonation,” 1976), and songbirds in the Sussex countryside (“English Meadow,” 1979).



Figure 4: Irv Teibel on assignment in rural England, late 1970s.

While listeners react differently to each track and tend to have definite favorites, a few tracks stand out for the unique and almost universal effect they have on those subjected to them. *Environments*, says media scholar Mack Hagood, is a type of orphic media, a “sonic facilitator of spatial and social control.”³⁶ “Gentle Rain in a Pine Forest” (1974), for example,

seems to make a room sound quieter than when the record is not playing. “Wood-Masted Sailboat” (1974), which between its creaking boards and flapping canvas sail combined an astonishing twenty-four separate tracks of sound, can make a room seem like it’s bobbing on the waves. The howling wind and banging shutters of “Alpine Blizzard” (1979) seems to lower the temperature in a room, and indeed was used for just this reason with soldiers stationed in Arizona. Nor are these effects limited to humans. The 1978 soundtrack that Teibel produced for Terrence Malick’s *Days of Heaven* was notable not only for its ultra-realistic rendering of locust stridulation, earning Teibel an Oscar nomination for sound design, but had the unintended effect of making real-life locusts flock to theaters where the movie was screening, lured by their Acrididae call.³⁷

As recently as 2019, the New York Times commented on this distinctive and enduring quality of Teibel’s work. In an article that pairs vintage photographs of rain-drenched New Yorkers with audio recordings of the same, one of Teibel’s lesser-known recordings of a rainy day in New York City’s Chinatown accompanies a 1968 photograph by Don Hogan Charles. The article’s author, Jessie Wender, writes: “The pairing conveys a sense of time and place, aural and visual, a reminder that like the rain, we too are a passing part of the landscape.”³⁸

While this article has to this point focused almost exclusively on Irv Teibel’s *Environments* recordings, that series is far from Teibel’s only notable achievement. If his fans consisted primarily of students, teachers, daycare providers, and alternative medicine practitioners through the early 1970s, a new release in 1973 changed all of that. The “Altered Nixon Speech” was first and foremost an exercise in editing magnetic tape, and only secondarily the stimulus that sparked Teibel’s “next” career. At the time, Teibel was teaching a class on experimental recording techniques at New York’s New School for Social Research, and to demonstrate to his students how one can manipulate magnetic tape, he brought in sixty seconds of a speech in which then-President Nixon denies all allegations of wrongdoing vis-à-vis the Watergate scandal. Before his students’ eyes, Teibel proceeded to make over 100 cuts to the tape before rearranging the segments and piecing them back together in intentional fashion. When played, the “altered” tape became a detailed confession in Nixon’s voice using his words, shocking Teibel’s student audience and then the world.

As the edited version of the tape was, to the untrained ear alone anyway, indistinguishable from an original recording, Teibel conclusively proved how “easy” it could be to tamper with evidence that would have theretofore been accepted without question



Figure 5: Irv Teibel editing magnetic tape in style in the early 1970s.

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in a court of law. In doing so, he also “surprised the public into listening to both the medium of tape and the news media in a skeptical, newly forensic manner.”³⁹ Next thing he knew, Teibel was fielding requests from big-wigs like Florida representative Bill Chappell and Senator Ted Kennedy, who either wanted to know how it was done out of a personal interest, or who wished him to serve as an expert witness in high-profile criminal case hearings, including those of mobsters John DiGilio and James Coonan, regarding audio tape evidence that may or may not have been similarly altered. It wasn’t long before other individuals, like prominent Big-Foot proponent Alan Berry, reached out to Teibel for help substantiating their audio evidence. In the case of the sasquatch, Teibel was unable to confirm or deny the legendary creature’s existence.

Then there are the Erickson Tapes, a synthesizer and harpsichord recording produced by Syntonic Research, Inc. and performed by Dr. Raymond Erickson, a noted Yale musicologist, in 1974. This album features Renaissance and baroque music and is very much in the vein of early electronic classical works like Wendy Carlos’s *Switched on Bach*.

In the late 1970s, Teibel returned to sound design for Errol Morris’s *Gates of Heaven*. For a brief period following, Teibel entertained the notion of branching out into video himself. What would it look like to pair his sounds with visuals? It seemed an obvious next step to a man who’d always compared his audio recordings to photographs: “The photographer is a professional eye,” he used to say, “[and] I am a professional ear.”⁴⁰ In an interview Teibel gave to Hans Werner in 1987, he discussed using “non-specific images, computer-generated images, clouds that have been altered optically or electronically so that they are not really clouds any more” as “corollaries” to his aural environments.⁴¹ Concluding, however, that they needed “a great deal more work yet,” Teibel did not release these videos before his death.



Figure 6: Irv Teibel with his trusty shotgun microphone, 1981.

I should reveal here that I, Jennifer Ballow, am Irv Teibel's oldest daughter, and that in the wake of my father's passing in 2010, the management of his estate fell to me. It wasn't something I sought out – I am a social worker, after all, not a recording artist like my father; though as a teenager I did help him with invoicing and filling orders⁴² – but even I can appreciate what Irv Teibel gave to the world, just as I recognize that what's not actively preserved can be lost. When a PhD candidate writing his dissertation on the history of white noise technology reached out to me several years ago, inquiring whether I still had any of my father's master recordings, followed by a similar ask from the British Broadcasting Corporation, I realized it was time to turn what remained of Syntonic Research, Inc. into the Irv Teibel Archive, what we lovingly refer to as Syntonic 2.0. Gathering together a few friends with more web expertise than myself, I helped to design the website that now hosts his biography and media appearances, as well as a selection of my father's photography. Included are links to all of his commercially available recordings in a digital format – among them, *Environments 1-11*, the Erickson Tapes, and "The Altered Nixon Speech" – made possible through a partnership with Chicago-based independent record label Numero Group, plus some never-before-released material for the true Irv Teibel aficionado.



Figure 7: Jennifer Ballow, daughter of Irv Teibel and manager of the Irv Teibel Archive in Austin, Texas. Photo credit: Melissa Bordeau, <https://bordeauphoto.com/>.

Documenting my father's work and legacy in this manner has been a long process, and at the time of this writing, is not yet totally complete. New evidence of or applications of his work emerge all the time; we do our best to document these on the irvteibel.com blog. Mechanically-speaking, the first thing we had to do to preserve and restore my father's legacy was locate his master reel-to-reel tapes, then find an audio engineer to digitize them. Next, the recordings had to be remastered by a second audio engineer to enhance their quality, so that we could

then file an official trademark application to federally protect Teibel’s work. Through Numero Group, we published the *Environments* app, now available in the App Store, and simultaneously made the remastered tracks (both mp3 and uncompressed formats) available through music streaming services iTunes and Spotify. At the same time, we wanted to make Teibel’s physical archive available to researchers and the general public. After vetting several potential venues, in 2016 the Irv Teibel Archive was proud to donate two complete sets of the *Environments* LP series, one to the New York Public Library and one to the British Library, where they have since been incorporated into those organization’s permanent collections.⁴³

That my father’s work continues to be readily accessible is important to me not only on a personal level, but also on behalf of those whose lives my father changed or whose art he inspired. Several musicians working today cite Irv Teibel as a major influence. Metal band Earth, noise titan Prurient, and electronic music duo Matmos have all tipped their caps to Teibel and the *Environments* series, as has pop musician Henry Gross.⁴⁴ Swedish dancer and choreographer Carmen Olsson recently set her performance piece “Flesh Being” to Teibel’s “Ultimate Heartbeat” (1974).⁴⁵ A new documentary on the history of New Age music mentions Irv Teibel’s contribution to the field beginning at the thirty-three-minute mark.⁴⁶ The research into music and sound therapy in general, and into my father’s contribution more specifically, is extensive and ongoing. We’re also still uncovering work my father made or collaborations he may have contributed to that were never released or publicized – such as a joint production between Irv Teibel and German experimental composer Karlheinz Stockhausen.

In closing, I’ll just say that Irv Teibel was many things throughout his life and career: an “ambient and New Age music pioneer”⁴⁷; the answer, for many, to “stress, troubled sleep, and the existential plaque of modern life”⁴⁸; the “unsung counterpoint to [British ambient musician] Brian Eno” as the impetus for modern spa and ambient music soundtracks;⁴⁹ “patient zero” for the “billion versions of rain sounds in a pine forest” on YouTube;⁵⁰ and, of course, the reason Carrie Bradshaw was able to purchase an ocean recordings white noise machine on HBO’s *Sex and the City*. But he was also a dad, a great one. I loved him and I miss him, may he rest in peace – the same kind of peace he gave the world.

Note: This article came out of a presentation entitled “Preserving and Renewing the Recorded Legacy of Irv Teibel” that author Jennifer Ballow gave to organizers and attendees of the ARSC 51st Annual Conference in 2017. She can be contacted at jenballow@gmail.com.

Endnotes

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