

On Searching for Information on Tefifon Devices and Audio Cartridges

This document may (and should!) be passed on in unaltered form to anyone who is interested in the radio history and technology of the Tefi company or who can contribute to research on it.

About the Company Tefi

In the 1950s, the German radio company Tefi developed an audio tape system and produced and marketed devices for playback (“Tefifons”) as well as cartridges with music recordings. The special feature of the Tefi audio tape system is that by recording a sound groove - like on a record - on an endless tape of up to 40 m in length, it was possible to play music continuously for up to 4 hours in very good sound quality.



The devices were very popular in Germany. However, there were also export activities to a certain extent, e.g. to Sweden and the USA.

Tefi's export activities to the USA are a special chapter in the company's history, about which little reliable knowledge currently exists. In the following, I list the most important findings that I have compiled:

Known Export Activities to the USA

According to previous findings, there have been two independent attempts to market Tefi devices in the USA:

1. Audio-Master Corporation

The Audio-Master company was the first importer of Tefi products around 1955-1957. Apparently two markets were addressed:

a) Consumer market

For the ordinary end user, KC-1 portable devices were imported, which also had an “audio master” label in addition to the “Tefifon” lettering:



The imported audio cartridges were called “Songbooks”. Titles were used that had already been produced for the German market. They limited themselves to instrumental pieces and just translated the label into English:



The above images are from the following YouTube video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYGUdWpeg_w&t=184s

Adam Savage's Tested: *Adam Savage's Mind Blown By This Vintage Audio Player!*

b) Professional market

For the professional market sector, attempts were made to use the Tefifon for background sound reinforcement - presumably in stores. The long playback time of Tefi cartridges was a great advantage here. Due to different playback speeds, there were cassettes with different playing times:

- 4 hours on a cartridge with 19 cm/s tape speed. The HS-19 chassis was probably used as the playback device.

- 8 hours on a cartridge with 9.5 cm/s tape speed. The playback device used was the HS-9.5, which was merely a slightly modified version of the HS-19:



The audio cartridges for background music were produced especially and presumably exclusively for the Audio-Master company:



2. Westrex

Around 1960 the company Westrex started the second attempt to import Tefi technology into the USA. In contrast to Audio-Master, Westrex endeavored to remove any Tefi lettering from the devices and cassettes.

According to current knowledge, the following devices were produced for Westrex:

- Westrex 111 W-178
- Westrex 111 W-180
- Radio with audio tape player "Claudia" T 602
- Tabletop device KC-4



Westrex acquired its own music material for the content of the cartridges and had the company Tefi produce cartridges exclusively for the US market.

The End of the Tefi Company

Declining demand due to competition from other technologies led to the company's closure around 1963. The technology quickly fell into oblivion. Today, even in Germany, only a few people know about the technology. A great deal of knowledge about Tefi audio technology and the Tefi company is therefore in danger of being gradually lost.

Documentation of Knowledge about the Tefi Company and the Tefifon

Most of the known knowledge about the company and the technology is documented in the book "Das Tefifon" by Herbert Jüttemann:



The book is a masterpiece and represents an enormous wealth of knowledge. However, a lot of what has become known in the last few years has not yet been reproduced in a book. Also - according to the latest findings - some of what is written in the book is incorrect.

As far as the Internet is concerned, most of the information available there is superficial and often factually incorrect or misleading.

This is where my work comes in: To find out more about Tefi and the technology, to expand and save the knowledge and to make the information available to the general public.

Request for support: Specific questions

To find out more about Tefi's export activities to countries like the US, I am looking for the following information:

- Photos of Tefi export appliances. Based on the photos, I can recognize special features of the export devices and identify which device revisions were exported in detail.
- Serial numbers (German: "Fabr.-Nr.") of Tefi appliances. From the collection of many serial numbers, I can determine how large the production and export figures actually were. Serial numbers are usually found on the back or underside of the devices on a small sticker. Other numbers attached to the device can also be helpful.
- Advertising material or other documents used at the time to advertise or report on Tefi technology and devices (possibly under the Westrex or Audio-Master label).
- Photos of cassettes with English-language labels. This can be used to determine which titles were produced for the US market and in what time frame the production took place. Photos of the top, bottom and front would be ideal:



- General information on the perception in the USA and among collectors: How was the technique accepted? How widespread was it? Are the devices in collections and sought after or largely ignored?
- Any other relevant information or information on possible contacts.

I hope that radio collectors, museums and other interested parties can send me information on this to fill the gaps in my knowledge. You can reach me at the e-mail address tefi@jave.de.

What happens with the collected Information?

For me, the information I collect is like pieces of a puzzle, from which I piece together the overall picture of Tefi's company history. Often, an inconspicuous piece of information – such as a particular component or a mark on a photo – has turned out to be the key to important insights.

I would like to make the findings available to the general public. This could perhaps take the form of a book or various documents for publication on the Internet. However, as I do this work as a hobby in my spare time, I am unfortunately unable to make any firm commitments regarding a specific timetable or similar.

I am also happy to support other radio collectors and interested parties with my knowledge. For example, I recently provided the Youtuber Techmoan with a lot of material and information for two of his videos on the subject of Tefifon:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpamZczQOTU&t=4s>
Techmoan: *Tefi : Band in the UK ...and other tales*
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKGY0_xC3co&t=128s
Techmoan: *At last! Stereo Tefifon - a unique audio experience*

With the hope of receiving numerous responses, I remain

With best regards

Markus Gebhard, August 2024