

# A true story like a movie – of real recording pioneers



In the beginning, they just wanted to build a better tape machine compared to the device that one of the Tani brothers brought home. That's how the story of TEAC and Katsuma and Tomona Tani began in the 50s. I'm following their leads back into the early 50s to tell you their story. Being a Portacapture X8 user myself, I feel like I'm tight in the middle of the latest chapter of a saga. A good screenwriting author could easily turn this into a good Netflix movie for sure.

**BY HEINER KRUSE** (a.k.a. The Green Man (TGM))

**O**n August 8th, 1953 “Tokyo Television Acoustic Company” was founded by the Tani-brothers, followed by “Tokyo Electronic Acoustic Company” in 1956. They merged in 1964 to become the “TEAC Corporation”. TAS-

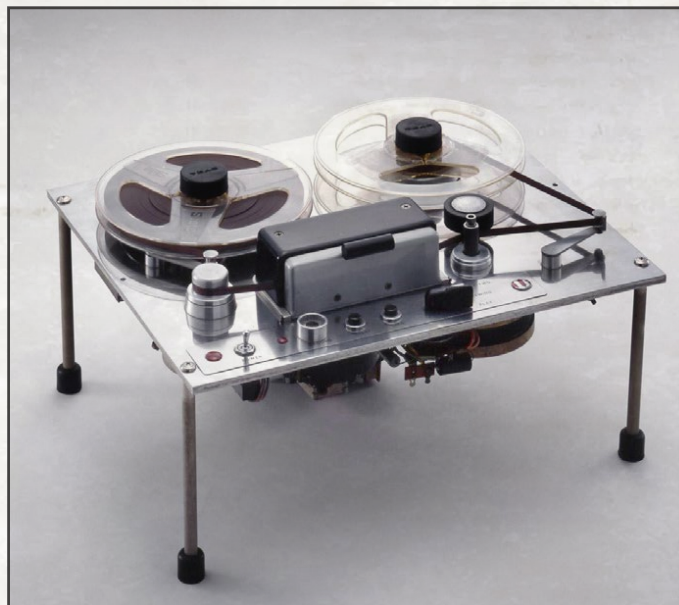
CAM Marketing Manager Dirk Born told me that today the company has around 400-500 employees. It's brands, TEAC, TASCAM, ESOTERIC, all deliver audio products, but in different ways and also more. TASCAM especially connects with

musicians and studios. But they all also make products for consumers. In fact, the three brand's target groups don't always seem clearly defined or sharply separated from each other, especially regarding the TEAC range of audio products.





Katsumo Tani presenting TEAC's first successful product, the TD-102 Tape Machine



TEAC TD-102 Tape Machine

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## A FIRST SUCCESS

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...came, when the company was able to sell 25 pieces of their first tape machine TD-102 into the US. This worked out after being able to match the American's own improvement suggestions. This spirit of "willing to improve and innovate" plus a close cooperation with US-Americans stands symbolically for many things happening later.

Already at this point TEAC products have been made for scientists and consumers as well. On the one hand, TEAC TD-330 tape machines captured and recorded signals and radio messages of Russian and American satellites coming from space in 1957. On the other hand, when pop music became popular in the 60s, boss Katsuma Tani ("Tani-San") demanded "TEAC must produce a high quality audio deck at a reasonable price, because our audio company has a mission to provide music for peoples' daily lives." The company then developed the A 20 HiFi stereo cassette deck, based on the technique of the data recording device, which became very popular.

During the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games, slow motion pictures were shown on regular television for the first time and everyone was very

impressed. Techniques behind this innovation were developed by TEAC together with Japanese TV channel NHK.

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## TASCAM – „AM“

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Starting in 1965, the US Government demanded local service companies being able to service and maintain goods imported from foreign manufacturers. For TEAC, in the beginning this was the newly founded TCA TEAC Corporation, but in 1971, together with Dr. Abe Yoshiharu, the Tani brothers founded "TASCAM". That name was put together from „TASC“, standing for TEAC Audio Systems Corp, and the ending „AM“ for "America." The Americans helped to bring simple audio products to a higher level in order to match higher audio standards. TASCAM products were meant to distinguish themselves from TEAC devices being targeted to fulfil the needs of professional musicians and studios.

Of course they still wanted to keep on delivering solid products with a reasonable price for a bigger market. Thus, in the 60s and 70s, TEAC released a 4 track tape machine called A-4010 in various versions and brought it to consumer's living rooms, it sold more than 200.000 times.

Apparently, the A-4010 GSL's 4 tracks on the one hand could be used in combination with an Auto Reverse functionality. Additionally, that device was capable of working in either horizontal or vertical position. This was also true for its successor A-6010 GSL, which also had an Echo effect option integrated.

At the same time, the company introduced Multitrack-Recording capabilities to some devices by improvising. TASCAM transformed the TEAC 4010 Recorder into the Simul-Sync 4-Track TCA-40-Series featuring Overdub-Recording. The first TASC multitrack recording devices were still distributed under the TEAC brand. TEAC's A-3340 was meant to play quadrophonic sound on 4 tracks at first. But this feature didn't become as popular as expected, while at the same time Multitrack Recording options with modified devices gathered a lot of interest. The "Simul-Sync" Technology of a modified A-3340S introduced a new tape head, which, for the first time, was able to record and play back sound simultaneously. This was exactly what was needed in order to be able to record on top of existing takes in sync! Musicians loved it. As an example, The "Eagles" own Don Felder composed the band's world famous pop hit "Hotel California" with the help of a TEAC 4 track tape machine.





TEAC A 20 Cassette Deck



TASCAM A-144 Portastudio

TEAC's A-6100 with Simul-Sync used a similar technology. Development in the following years was a lot about improving the tape machine's drive's quality. The A-6100 also was a predecessor of TASCAM's very popular 80-8 Recorders, an 8-track half inch tape machine.

TASCAM products gained a lot of popularity. They were used by artists like Boston, Kansas or Alan Parsons, but also were noticed by broader audience, being used when R2-D2 and C-3PO voices were created and sound was added with their help in "Star Wars" movies, which was a marketing success.

But the 70s and 80s also saw extraordinary Cassette Decks by TEAC. I remember strolling around in my home town of Cologne's "Saturn" store, which was presenting a

world famous "World's biggest HiFi exhibition" on many huge floors during that time. It included a room full of Tape Decks, including gorgeous TEAC Cassette Decks that were out of my pocket money reach. In 1985, TEAC presented ZD-5000, their first CD-Player. TEAC is one of very few manufacturers still offering a decent consumer HiFi Double Cassette Deck (W-1200), including a Microphone-Input for Karaoke and USB Out for digitalization.

### LADY GAGA AND HER PORTASTUDIO

TASCAM's "Portastudio" Multi-track-Cassette-Recorders started to make home recording affordable. Actually those are re-gaining value again and prices on used gear platforms such as "Reverb" are rising.

In 1979, TEAC's 144 was the first device of such kind, it's the one that Bruce Springsteen used to record his album "Nebraska". In a 2009 interview, Lady Gaga declared her TASCAM Portastudio to be the best present she ever received from her father. It was easy to use and she could just sit at the piano, connect a Mic and start recording." TASCAM's actual models, digital Portastudios DP-006 (6-channel) and DP-24SD (24-channel) tie in with that spirit.

### 90S AND TURN OF THE MILLENIUM

TASCAM's DAT-Recorders like DA-30mk2 were extremely popular in the late 90s, I had one in a smaller DA-20 in my Basswerk studio back then. TASCAM's



TASCAM DR-60D mk2 4-Track Recorder with DSLR Mount



TASCAM US-428 Audiointerface



## MILESTONES IN TEAC/ TASCAM COMPANY HISTORY

- 1953** Founding of Tokyo Television Acoustic Company
- 1956** Founding of Tokyo Electronic Acoustic Company
- 1957** Export of 25 TD-102 Tape Recorders into USA, use of TAC-TD330 to record radio transmissions of Russian Sputnik satellites
- 1964** Birth of TEAC Corporation, merging the two former companies. Development/broadcast of slow motion technology for tv live broadcasts/ Tokyo Olympic Games
- 1967** Data Recorder R-400
- 1968** TEAC A-20 Cassette Deck
- 1971/72** Birth of TASCAM company. TASCAM starts to convert Teac 4010 Recorders into the Simul-Sync 4-Track TCA-40-Series with Overdub-capabilities.
- 1973** TASCAM is integrated into TEAC Corporation
- 1976** The "Eagles" Don Felder composes „Hotel California“ with the help of a small TEAC 4-Track-Recorder
- 1977** Recording of Voices for R2-D2 and C-3PO in "Star Wars" with a Tascam 80-8 Tape Recorder
- 1978** TEAC A-800 3 Kopf Cassette Deck
- 1984** Porta One, best-selling home recording Portastudio
- 1985** Tascam 388 8 Channel Mixer and Recorder, TEAC ZD-5000 CD-Player
- 1987** Founding of high end audio brand ESOTERIC with high end CD-Players P-0 and P-1 as well as Digital-Analog-Converter D-1
- 1993** Beginning of production for DA-88 8-Track-Recorders
- 2000** TASCAM USB-428 - first USB-Audiointerface
- 2000** Emmy Award für MMR-8 Recorder und MMP-16 Player
- 2001** High Definition DSD-Recording with TASCAM's DS -D98 (on up to 512 tracks when stacked)
- 2003** Release of Tascam CD-GT 1 CD Trainer
- 2009** Release of TASCAM's DR-100, professional mobile Audiorecorder with XLR-Ins
- 2012** Beginning of a strategic alliance with ONKYO
- 2013** Gibson buys a major amount of TEAC shares/ founding of a strategic alliance
- 2018** Gibson is restructured and gives back shares
- 2018** TASCAM releases MODEL 24, Integrated Production Suite/ Mixer/ Recorder/ DAW Controller
- 2021** TASCAM introduces Portacapture X8 and Mixcast 4 multifunctional devices (Mixer, Recorder, Podcast-Tool, Audiointerface)
- 2021** IK Multimedia releases T-Racks Tascam Tape Collection Plug-Ins with Porta One, Tascam 388, A-6100mk2 and TEAC A-3340S emulations
- 2022** Tascam CD-RW 900SX CD-Recorder, CD-A580 combined CD-Player, Cassetten Deck and USB-Recorder, major Firmware-Updates and improvements for Tascam Portacapture X8 und Mixcast 4



## TASCAM Portacapture X8



TASCAM Portacapture X8 together with TASCAM DR-100mk2



User-Settings after Firmwareupdate 1.30



Presets for Input Settings after Firmwareupdate 1.30



DA-88 was another studio standard, an 8-Track-Multitrack Recorder, it also allowed cascading and worked with Hi8 videotapes. This device won Emmy Awards. It was also used in NASA Space Shuttles and it even worked after a rough landing on earth. TASCAM D-D98 in 2001 provided High Definition DSD-Recording for studios - on up to 512 tracks when stacked.

### POTENTIAL MOVIE- AND NOVEL-QUALITIES

More than 20 years ago a first book with more details about TASCAM's exciting evolution was published ("30 Years of Recording Evolution" by Randy Alberts). But things went on this way. Also there were quite a lot of changes regarding ownership and co-operations.

### RECENT TIMES

In 2000, TASCAM presented its "US-428", their first USB-Audio-Interface, allowing mobile recording with computers without having to use a PCI-card. Until today, TASCAM offers a lot of USB-Audio-Interfaces like the 16-channel US-16x08 or the High Resolution US-1x2HR, US-2x2HR and US-4x4HR. There's also the new Port-

capture X8 Recorder or the Mix-cast4 Podcast Studio (more on that later). Both can serve as an audio interface as well.

In 2003, TASCAM released the CD-GT1, a "CD-Trainer" for Guitarists. Playback pitch and speed could be altered separately with this device, which was a special feature. This way, Guitarists were able to play riffs they wanted to learn by playing them slower, so that they could practice and learn them. It also included a Metronome, a tuning function plus various Guitar FX. TASCAM professional products still commonly use CD's as a medium for recording. It was just recently that TASCAM announced the CD-RW 900 SX CD-Recorder, which was on top of the list on TASCAM's website [www.tascam.eu](http://www.tascam.eu) during the time of writing.

TASCAM also developed more devices for Field Recording and created devices for audio recording during movie shooting, including supporting devices for filming with a DSLR or mirrorless System cameras later on.

I made a lot of use of TASCAM's DR-100mk2, a very reliable recorder that was released in 2013. I used it for recording the KMGV Koelner Maenner Gesangverein choir connecting an external Stereo-Mic that

needed Phantom power. Thanks to its internal battery, additional AA cells in its battery slot and further additional AA batteries in its' external battery pack, enough power for long recording sessions with unexpected events has always been guaranteed. Still TASCAM's Manager Dirk Born insisted that "Portacapture X8 may have a big screen, but batteries that will stay fresh for longer, since all those new and modern parts consume much less power compared to older devices".

TASCAM's DR-60Dmk2 Audio Recorder from 2014 is still available, it can be used for 4 Track Recordings allowing a combination of Mic and Line In, which is very useful for vlogging, I've got and used it in my studio too. It provides phantom power for two Mics and can also be mounted on a camera's flash shoe.

In 2013, US American company Gibson bought a major amount of TEAC shares, but gave them back in 2018. In 2018 TEAC and IK Multimedia joined forces to emulate famous TASCAM Tape Machines as a plug-in which IK Multimedia is offering as part of their T-Racks Mastering Series. In the early 2000s TASCAM was also offering the famous Gigastudio Sampler they had taken over from Nemysys, but it was discontinued in 2008.





**TASCAM Mixcast 4**

Today, similar to the past, the TEAC brand is offering a wide range of useful products, including devices that have nothing to do with audio: Take for example the WX-7000, providing processes to measure wideband data in various fields and on multiple channels. It is used by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) for developing rocket engines and analyze vibrations. “TEAC Technical Medical Imaging” are producing medical video recorders. They also produce “Load Cells” using their long-standing experience in high-precision force measurement. TEAC’s Portastream PS-V50, on the other hand, is a mobile streaming service providing In-Flight Entertainment. Then again I remember buying that really tiny and reasonably priced TEAC consumer .mp3 Player for a very reasonable price around 15 years ago. I was attracted by its brand name and its demo song is still ringing in my ears – and I guess I’m not the only one.

Today’s TASCAM product palette is really diverse in a similar way. TASCAM offers a lot of mobile recorders

that can also be used as audio-interfaces. Following the trails of the past those often come up with surprising new extra features like W-LAN and Bluetooth connectivity, attachable Lavalier microphones or a 4 track recording feature. One can also find professional recording and player products of all kinds that can hardly be found elsewhere: TASCAM’s CD-A580v2 is a professional, studio quality, rackmountable CD-Player, Cassette Deck and USB-Recorder combination(!). TASCAM’s TM-250 is a USB condenser microphone for vocal recording including headphone outs (!). TASCAM is also offering high quality headphones and amplifiers.

More recent additions in TASCAM’s product portfolio are its products optimized for podcasting. Trying to combine innovations, a reasonable price tag, professional features and consumer-friendly device operation is quite a task though - and may not always lead to the optimum results in the first place. Some patience and little steps in between are often necessary, take TASCAM’s Portacapture X8 as an example. It is a

high-resolution multitrack recorder, USB-C audio-interface, podcast studio and mixer. There were three major updates in 2022 that improved weaknesses I criticized when testing it in professional audio 01/22. On August 31st, Firmware 1.3 was released and Portacapture X8 is now also capable of recording 32 Bit/192 kHz when working as an audio interface. Also one can now use three user settings and three input setting presets in order to quickly access desired configurations.

Portacapture X8’s new “Mix-Minus” feature was implemented to prevent the interviewer hearing the own voice as an echo during phone interviews. This feature is already known from TASCAM’s Mixcast 4, which also is a mixer with talkback, podcast studio, recorder and USB-C audio interface, additionally equipped with 8 faders and 8 trigger pads to fire up station jingles or samples. There have been three firmware updates for Mixcast 4 in 2022 as well.

I have to admit I am seeing TASCAM products, their features, quality and product design with different eyes now, having learnt those impressive stories from their past. In the 90s, I worked for an American company in New York, too – helping to introduce their products to the German market. So this not only brought back some fond memories to me, I also have respect towards the achievements. I am really excited and keen to know what comes next from TASCAM. ■



**TASCAM TM-250U Vocal Mic with Headphone Out**



**TASCAM CD-RW 900SX CD Recorder**