

## Spotlight on Music Collections: EMI Music Canada Fonds

*This edition of Spotlight on Music Collections takes us to Calgary, Alberta, and features a conversation with David Jones at the University of Calgary, who is working to preserve the EMI Music Canada Fonds. David speaks to some of the unique and familiar Canadian artists represented in the collection, aspects of digital migration, and a preview of what the digital collection (launching summer 2022) will contain.*

*Spotlight on Music Collections aims to profile interesting or unique music collections and archives in Canada through the voices of those who work with them. If you have a suggestion for a collection or individual that should be featured in a future edition of this column, please contact [carolyn.doi@usask.ca](mailto:carolyn.doi@usask.ca).*

### ***What is your role at the University of Calgary?***

My name is David Jones, and since 2020, I have been the Project Archivist for the [EMI Music Canada fonds](#) at the University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. Prior to this role, I worked as an Audiovisual Conservation Assistant at U of C, working with the digital migration team.

**IMAGE 1.** DAVID JONES, PROJECT ARCHIVIST, ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS WITH THE EMI MUSIC CANADA ARCHIVAL BOXES.  
PHOTO CREDIT: ANDY NICHOLS, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY.



## *What are the EMI Music Canada Fonds and how did they come to arrive at the University of Calgary?*

EMI Music Canada was one of the major record labels in Canada and played a vital role in fostering a domestic market and roster here in Canada. The label has its roots in Capitol Records of Canada, a subsidiary of the American label Capitol Records, established in 1949 in London, Ontario before moving to Toronto in 1956. In 1955, Capitol was acquired by the British label EMI, which is why the label has been known at times as Capitol Records of Canada, Capitol Records-EMI of Canada and finally EMI Music Canada. By the 1960s, the label enjoyed a financial windfall following the success of the Beatles and other British Invasion bands. Capitol Records of Canada had been the first North American label to bring these acts to the continent and soon was able to establish a domestic A&R department, record pressing plant and later CD manufacturing facilities. The label opened branch offices throughout Canada and established a French repertoire division in Montreal.

Many familiar and successful Canadian acts were represented by the label, such as Anne Murray, Tom Cochrane, Susan Aglukark, Glass Tiger, Stompin' Tom Connors, Northern Pikes Edward Bear, Helix, The Rankin Family, Rita MacNeil, Skinny Puppy, k-os, The Tea Party and so many others. There are literally thousands of artists represented by the label, which distributed international artists and artists from subsidiary and associated labels, such as Virgin Music Canada, Nettwerk, Anthem and Aquarius, among others. The fonds contains the complete assets of the company which consists of about 5500 boxes of textual, photographic, audiovisual, and digital content. It can be daunting to sum up without getting into the details, but we have the entire corporate archive of a major record label – something that is very rare to see in a public institution. I'm particularly interested in the places at the far reach of the label, such as demo tapes, sub-labels, and A&R activities. The label had quite a reach across the spectrum of Canadian music and culture, which of course carries with it a lot of power in determining the landscape of cultural production across the country.

I asked my colleague at U of C, Annie Murray, one of the original Principal Investigators of the project, to comment on how the material came to the U of C: "When Universal Music acquired EMI Music Canada in 2012, they were considering where to place the archival materials documenting the history of Capitol Records of Canada and EMI Music Canada. They were aware of the National Music Centre being established in Calgary and thought Calgary might be a good place to preserve the history of the labels. Andrew Mosker of the National Music Centre eventually connected with the University of Calgary's Libraries and Cultural Resources to explore the possibility of the archives coming to the university. In fall 2014, a small team from Libraries and Cultural Resources began discussions and planning with Universal Music Canada. The first materials were transferred in 2015, and the donation was announced to the public in March 2016 to coincide with the Junos being held in Calgary."

***I understand that digital preservation and digitization of the archive is a major aspect of the project. Can you describe that work and some of the long-term goals that go along with the digital preservation of the EMI Music Canada fonds?***

Yes, digital preservation, and what we refer to as digital migration, are central aspects of the project. We are at a very critical time where much of the recorded history of the second half of the twentieth century is at risk of disappearing. Thanks to a grant from the Mellon Foundation and ongoing support from Universal Music Canada, we have the resources to migrate as much as we can from the at-risk formats in the archive. The U of C has built an in-house migration studio with professional hardware and playback machines, many of historical vintage, to accommodate the migration of some of the more prevalent formats in our collection. Accompanying the studio is an imaging lab where high-resolution digital images capture every angle of the original object and accompanying material. These objects might be open reel audiotapes (such as 24-track 2-inch, or ¼-inch, 2-track open reel audiotape), video formats (such as U-Matic, Betacam and 1 and 2-inch open reel videotape) or audiotapes (Digital Audio Tapes, Compact Cassettes). For digital-born data records, we have a digital forensics lab to access and preserve data from obsolete formats.

I asked our electronic records archivist, E-A Johnson, to comment on this question: “Making sure that the material in the EMI Music Canada fonds is accessible long-term is an integral part of the work we’re doing with this collection. For the born-digital material in the collection, which came in on floppy disks and hard drives among other formats, it’s important that we migrate it onto more stable forms of media. We’re also currently implementing a digital preservation system that will ensure that the digital material doesn’t degrade over time. This system can also migrate files that may be in proprietary or out-of-date file formats to more standard and open formats, to make sure that the files themselves are readable in the future. Our goal is that the material in this collection is preserved so that users of the fonds will be able to access this material decades down the line.”

Finally, it is important to note that one of our main goals with this project is to make the content available to researchers and anyone who is interested in it. This includes the paper and photographic portion of the archive, which is being arranged and described and physically stored at our facilities in Calgary, as well as the audiovisual content, for which we have been developing an online digital asset management system.

***What has been one of the biggest challenges of working with the various media in the fonds?***

I’m sure that everyone involved in the project can name their own particular challenge or challenges. For me, since my role is to do a lot of the archival processing on the fonds, I need to be able to identify and contextualize audiovisual assets. This requires having a deep knowledge of A/V formats and their role in the production and promotion of the commercial offerings of the record label. Knowledge of music history and cultural production in Canada and elsewhere is also useful. There is a lot of learning to do on the job, and I often rely on contacts and colleagues to help me out with this.

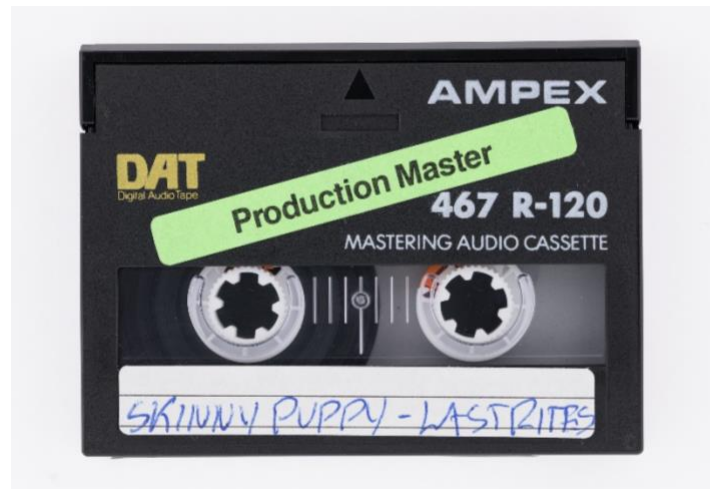
***Can you share one of your favourite things about working on this project?***

I think it's the ability to combine several of my interests in one. In at least some capacity I'm a musician, technological experimentalist, historian, and music lover. In my personal life, I collect recorded music, music-making machines and playback equipment. I've written and published on music and popular culture and spent some time performing on stage, recording in studios, and playing with bands.

***Do you have a favourite object that is in the collection?***

It's hard to settle on a single object, but objects with the most dramatic appearance are probably the film reels and vintage cans, especially when inspecting them on a light table. But there is a specific and unassuming DAT tape that I particularly like. It's the original master of a Skinny Puppy album with a track that, due to copyright infringement, never got released. I was a big fan in my teenage years and had never heard the full album as it was originally intended.

**IMAGE 2.** ORIGINAL LP MASTER FOR SKINNY PUPPY'S ALBUM "LAST RIGHTS" ON DAT TAPE. NOTE THE SPELLING OF THE ALBUM TITLE AS IT APPEARS ON THE ORIGINAL MASTER BEFORE THE COPYRIGHT STRIKE. IMAGE CREDIT: UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.



***What is one thing you would like readers to know about EMI Music Canada? How can we learn more about the work that's happening with this project?***

Oh, that would definitely be the upcoming launch of our digital collection this fall. Visitors to our Digital Collections site will be able to stream audio and video content and view high-definition photographs of the original asset. Researchers and anyone who is interested in the subjects or content can request full access to assets for their own use. The archive contains invaluable information on so many different aspects of music, film, and video production in Canada. This

includes offering critical insight into major labels, artists and corporate or administrative bodies involved. As a body that had such reach across the cultural landscape here, going for a deep dive into the archival finding aids or through the Digital Collections site can be surprisingly rewarding. It will be an extremely rich source for academic and popular research.

Those interested can keep an eye on [digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca](http://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca) where the digital collection will be staged this fall.

**IMAGE 3.** HANDWRITTEN NOTES BY THE MASTERING ENGINEER, WHICH IS AN EXAMPLE OF SOME OF THE TECHNICAL RECORDS THAT ACCOMPANY THE AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS. IMAGE CREDIT: UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.

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