



# David Hadzis

The project manager for United Music Foundation, Switzerland talks audio preservation with **NIGEL JOPSON**

Starting his career in the music industry as a musician and composer, Hadzis progressed to engineering and production, working with artists such as Charles Aznavour, Petula Clark, Michel Colombier, Siedah Garrett, Paul Jackson Jr., Esther Ofarim, Bernard Estardy, St Germain and Andy Williams. He now specialises in recorded music heritage preservation, restoration and history.

## When was the United Music Foundation created?

In 2013, after finding out the big void there is in this field: currently, most foundations are concerned about preserving their own archives, such as INA in France, Fonsart in Switzerland, the BBC in the UK, or the Library of Congress in the US. They tend to limit the source of what they preserve to their own country.

Although the United Music Foundation did, of course, preserve some recordings from the archives of public radio services, and some unreleased Montreux Jazz Festival concerts, they also aim to be there for all the recordings that are not currently covered by any other similar non-profit organisation, regardless of the music style or the country they come from. The amount of tapes that can be preserved only depends on the available funds to do it, so it is up to patrons and sponsors to keep us going.

## How did you first become involved in audio restoration?

I never had any formal training in audio. Experience and instinct were the only keys for me, in an era where this was more common. Over the years, working was my learning curve. As a young man I started recording as a singer, and went to MIDEM in Cannes to promote my record. I sang at a showcase, and some guy came up to me afterwards and gave me his business card. It was Claude Nobs of the Montreux Jazz Festival. Back in Switzerland, we met again and we talked about Petula Clark who, just like me, lives in Geneva. Claude Nobs asked me if I wanted to retrieve Petula's master tapes.

I thought I would find about one or two tapes, but eventually, I found seven full boxes of them in Montreux, and took them back home where, by chance, I had just set up my very first home studio. There were also multi-tracks, mainly from Pye Studios in London or United-Western Recorders in Los Angeles (recorded with the Wrecking Crew), on 3 or 4-track 1/2" tapes, as well as 1" 8-track and 2" 16-track tapes, also recorded in the US. Little by little, this led me to start working on Petula's reissues in the '90s and 2000s. I also got to write some songs for her, and went on to co-produce three of them in Los Angeles with the late Michel Colombier. During these sessions, held both at

his own studio and Capitol Studios (with the great Steve Durkee engineering), Michel taught me how to do vocal edits and to select the best takes, which made me realise the importance of human emotion over technical perfection.

I started my own recording facility in Geneva, working with many artists including Petula and Charles Aznavour. I restored and mastered audiophile jazz reissues for a Japanese label, some French or international pop recordings for other labels, was given the opportunity to re-master Saint Germain's classic album *Tourist*, and kept embracing all types of music with an open heart. All this work led to being offered a position as project manager for the United Music Foundation, which would require all the experience I already had for my clients.

## What type of source material has the Foundation worked on?

We've already preserved hundreds of recordings, from various audio tape standards, acetate discs, and other more unusual media such as late '50s Minifon cassettes. These recordings include previously unreleased works by artists in all music styles, ranging from jazz with legends Sidney Bechet, Lionel Hampton or Sarah Vaughan to pop and rock icons such as Celine Dion or Jimi Hendrix.



/ Before, After



**What motivates copyright owners to bring material to you?**

With the come-back of vinyl, I hear more and more about labels wishing to cut lacquers directly from tape. But this becomes increasingly difficult since, over time, tapes get dropouts, clicks, splices no longer stick and need to be replaced, and there's the dreaded 'sticky shed syndrome' that requires baking the tapes before being able to play them. The baking process dries the tapes and temporarily restores the chemical properties of the binder that holds the different oxide layers together. I've had to do that a lot, especially with Ampex tapes from the '70s and '80s. Not to mention working with tapes so covered with mould I had to wear a surgical mask to avoid bronchitis, due to the nature of that kind of fungus!

**What has been your most extreme restoration challenge?**

Last October, I restored about 20 tapes from the late '50s to early '60s that had been in a flood in a Paris basement. Their AEG hubs were so rusted that they disintegrated like crackers! This process requires lots of patience and 'soft experimenting'. One of these tapes had become so loose it wouldn't stay flat on the tape head, resulting in a warbling sound. So I had to transfer it holding it with my thumbs on both sides of the tape head to keep it still. In this field, anything goes! It's the result that counts. The golden rule is to always be gentle with the tapes!

**Which digital format do you archive to?**

We only preserve audio in high resolution (minimum 24-bit 96kHz) using state-of-the-art converters and wiring (Prism Sound and Vovox respectively). Most importantly, when it comes to audio tape, our policy is to always set the tape head's azimuth to the recorded content, to avoid phasing and get the most complete frequency range. We don't use any sort of computer-automated system running a series of tape machines, and we never will. We aim to use technology to serve the music and not the other way round!

**What happens to the audio after restoration?**

With the support of patrons and sponsors, the United Music Foundation aims to make these

recordings available to the public by releasing 'no-compromise' Collectors Editions including not only the best possible restoration and mastering work, but also all their historical background through biographies, interviews, pictures and memorabilia.

One of our releases, the Sidney Bechet in Switzerland box set, which includes four CDs of rare or unreleased recordings preserved and restored from original audio tapes and acetate discs, plus a 216-page art book, has received two national awards: The Best Reissue Award from the Académie du Jazz (Paris), and the Memoriam — Swiss Commission for UNESCO Award.

**The Sidney Bechet box set sounds like a labour of love!**

That set took two years in the making. Not only because of the condition and the various types of media involved (mainly tapes, rarely in good condition, and 78rpm acetate discs), but also because we had to source all the information behind these recordings. Eventually, it became a 216-page art book with four CDs, including a quite thorough essay in French and English, as well as 250 restored photos and 140 facsimiles of rare memorabilia, most of them restored and seen for the very first time.

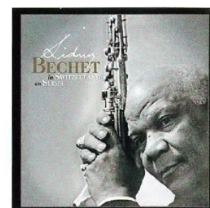
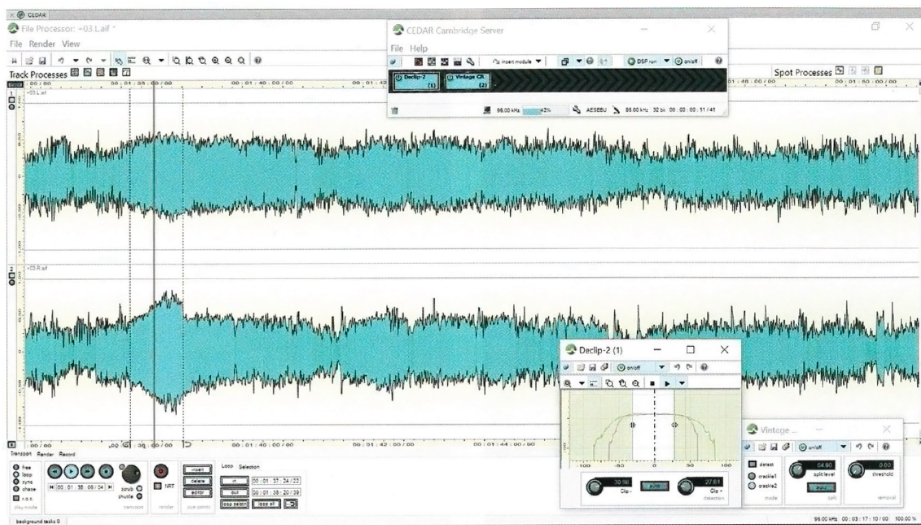


Photo: © Jean-Baptiste Millot



**/ CEDAR Declip processing**

**How do you deal with the background noise from 78rpm and acetates?**

Before the United Music Foundation acquired the CEDAR Cambridge IV system, even with access to a broad range of audio restoration software and plugins, I had no other choice than to send our more complex restoration work to a company outside Switzerland. Last December, during my visit to the CEDAR Audio headquarters in Cambridge, I was blown away with some miracles that could be achieved. The processes included in the CEDAR Cambridge IV are much more straightforward than anything I have worked with so far, and I could hear and apply satisfactory results right away. Besides, it's the only system that can really efficiently remove distortion and even correct azimuth instabilities that happen when some audio tapes get warped due to chemical degradation.

**How did you integrate CEDAR Cambridge IV with your Mac computer, as CEDAR is based on PC?**

During my training session at the CEDAR Cambridge headquarters last December, I was advised to use the free Microsoft Remote Desktop Software, which connected fine, but due to the lack of available screen resolution options, all desktop elements, including icons and the Cedar software screens, were too small or, when set to the right size, looked a bit blurred! So I looked for another solution based on the same protocol, and found an app called Royal TSX, which had a more complete set of screen resolution settings, and allowed me to get the same display quality as the output of the Cedar Cambridge monitor card. However, the RDP protocol is extremely slow when it comes to transferring files from one computer to the other. So I just created a LAN connection which


I can access from the Mac's finder. For the audio part, I routed the AES outputs to the inputs of the excellent Metric Halo ULN-8 sound card, which I use for mastering. So ergonomics are now guaranteed.

A few days ago, I was asked to transfer a series of LP's since the original tapes have been lost. One of them was heavily clicking! I then decided to use Cedar's DeClickle module and — just like magic — all the clicks disappeared leaving me with a much cleaner audio file.

**How can potential clients take advantage of your services?**

Further to the acquisition of our CEDAR system, the United Music Foundation has decided to offer its tape preservation and audio restoration services to all private and public tape owners, including independent labels, record companies, music publishers, radio stations, or even private owners of recorded music heritage. All profits arising from these services will be used by the foundation to pursue its mission.

The Cedar Cambridge IV system was acquired thanks to the support of Loterie Romande, Fonds Mécénat SIG, a Geneva private foundation, as well as Carigest SA, in the name of a generous donor, who have all understood the importance of making a system available for the first time in Switzerland.

So far, we have noticed that preserving audio-visual heritage is much less supported financially than restoring paintings, sculptures and buildings, etc. Even though it has been recognised that the media that contains audio-visual heritage is much more fragile and at risk, and has a much shorter lifespan. If the owner of some vintage recordings wants to have them restored, the foundation will mainly act as a service provider with the necessary expertise and equipment, unless that specific project is being financed thanks to the support of donors or sponsors. 

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