



Archiving Video Materials

January 2010

These are the current recommendations from Dance Heritage Coalition for preserving video documentation of your live performance works.

Reformatting

Be they analog (VHS, S-VHS, Hi-8, U-matic, Betamax, etc.) or digital tapes (DV, Mini DV, DVCAM, DVCPR0, etc.), artists are advised to employ archival best practices by transferring any materials that are on videotape to uncompressed native digital video files wrapped in multimedia container formats such as Quicktime.

- Transfer original footage into digital format and save the new file as an uncompressed Quicktime movie file.
- Save digital files on an external hard drive. Ideally, you will save two copies on two different hard drives, and store them in two different geographic locations. These should be optimal storage locations that are climate controlled and dust free. These are your archival files. They are not intended for viewing.
- Additionally, create an archival copy on a Gold DVD with the uncompressed Quicktime file only. Do not process the file through software like iDVD or DVD Studio Pro, because these software programs create “lossy” files that don’t contain all the audiovisual information in the uncompressed file. This Gold DVD and the files on the external hard drives are not intended for viewing, but may be needed in the future for creating new access copies or for transferring to new formats as the technology changes.
- Create at least two viewing DVDs on regular DVD-R discs. These can be processed through iDVD or DVD Studio Pro software. These *are* intended for frequent viewing. Make as many copies as seems appropriate for you.

Warning: DVDs should not be used for preservation purposes! DVDs are fine as reference copies, however, DVDs have severe limitations:

- DVDs are highly compressed versions of the originals: selective data is irretrievably discarded in making the new DVD copy.
- The life span of this medium is not yet known; sufficient age testing results have not been made available to the archival community.
- Failure of a DVD usually ends in total failure; failure of a tape (such as Digi-Beta), by contrast, may involve only limited portions of the tape, making other recovery techniques possible. Always keep your original tapes!

Before Playing Your Tapes: Safe Handling and Playback

- Inspect tapes for dirt, fungus, residues, or other damage. If apparent, consult with a trained professional. Tape cleaning is a difficult and exacting process, which should not be attempted by untrained staff or without proper equipment.
- Do not play the tape if the case is damaged.
- Ensure that playback equipment is working properly before inserting a tape. Insert a test tape before playing important ones.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for care and cleaning of playback equipment. Take all precautions to prevent dust and dirt from entering the tape path; these particles can scratch the tape's surface.
- Clean tape heads between plays with cotton swabs and laboratory-grade isopropyl alcohol or a Freon cleaner when playing original or master copies. A buildup of oxide will also scratch the tapes.

Storage

Safe storage practices for all tape formats:

- Store your videotapes upright, on edge, like books on a library shelf.
- Label, number and index your materials so that your system can be understood by others. Ask a local special collection or library to help you organize the identifying information for your materials, and create a simple database or Excel-type file for it.
- Collect and store the event programs, flyers and press. Make sure that the year is included as often posters and programs don't add the year to the dates. Label and include their location in the master index. Store posters flat. Use acid-free containers or folders for paper materials.
- Save the original tape that the work was recorded on! Store it in its case, in a climate controlled and dust free environment.
- Never store all copies of the same original in one place.
- Eliminate as much dust and dirt in your storage area as possible.
- Ban eating smoking and drinking in the storage area.
- Avoid materials that emit airborne particles such as carpeting, fabric fibers and exposed insulation. Do not permit any gaseous fumes.
- Never store tapes in direct sunlight.
- Avoid places subject to extremes of temperature and humidity, such as near radiators or in attics or basements.
- Use metal rather than wooden shelving. Wood is a fire hazard and also might hold moisture, which promotes fungus growth. Avoid particle board which off-gases and is difficult to clean well.
- Store tapes in protective archival containers that are hard shelled, dust and water resistant and chemically inert. Avoid cardboard containers.

- Keep a minimum of three copies of each tape: the original, a master (copied from the original and used to make further copies) and a reference copy for loans and everyday use.

Resources

Gaylord Brothers (archival supplies) <http://www.gaylord.com/archivalsupplies.asp>

Hollinger Metal Edge (archival supplies) <http://www.hollingermetaledge.com/>

MAM-A Inc (for Gold DVDs) <http://www.mam-a.com/>

Legacy

If a collection is being donated to a library, the artist should specify their intentions in the Deed of Gift.

Artists should also address their intentions to share or restrict access to their work in their will.