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Dance Heritage Coalition and Dance Theatre of Harlem Awarded Save America's Treasures Grant

Funds will preserve DTH's endangered archival legacy

The Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC) and Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH) have been jointly awarded a Save America's Treasures (SAT) Grant, which will provide \$58,853 in federal funds for preservation and conservation of DTH's irreplaceable and culturally significant archives. The SAT awards were announced February 1, 2011, at a ceremony held in President Lincoln's Cottage in Washington, DC.

Saving the archives is a key component of DTH executive director Laveen's Naidu and artistic director Virginia Johnson's vision for turning the company's home into a cultural hub for the Harlem community. Dance Theatre of Harlem is a groundbreaking company founded in 1969 by Arthur Mitchell as America's first African-American professional ballet troupe. Throughout its history, DTH has been distinguished by both innovation and artistic excellence, and has maintained a special focus on community outreach and cultural exchange. DTH's forty-year history is documented in extensive archives, but these materials have remained largely invisible, and have been imperiled by recent financial constraints. The funds provided by the SAT grant will enable DTH to carry on and augment work begun by archivist Judy Tyrus to re-house fragile paper materials, photographs and negatives, organize and safely house moving image materials, digitize photographs, and perform conservation on the most valuable and endangered video and recorded sound materials.

This is the third SAT grant entrusted to the expertise of the DHC, the sole national organization dedicated to documenting and preserving America's dance legacy. Previous grants have enabled the DHC to aid other dance companies around the country perform vital preservation work on their archives. DHC Project Manager Imogen Smith, who visited Dance Theatre of Harlem in March 2010 as part of a Mellon-funded Archives Assessment project, says, "I was simultaneously struck by the value of DTH's collections, the severity of the risks they faced, and the passionate dedication of the company to saving their archives." In addition to providing supplies and services, the DHC helps companies establish sustainable practices for managing and caring for their archives, through training and environmental improvements. "The Save America's Treasures grant will begin key preservation work to ensure that DTH's legacy remains in the public eye and memory," said DHC Executive Director Libby Smigel.

Among the 61 groups receiving funding for 2011, the DHC/DTH project is one of only two dedicated to dance materials. The award affirms and recognizes the vital role of dance in America's cultural heritage.

Save America's Treasures, devoted to preserving historic and culturally important sites, artifacts, documents and collections, is a joint program of the National Park Service (NPS) and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PYCAH), in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and the program's private partner, the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Since 1999, Save America's Treasures has awarded 1,287 grants, totaling almost \$300 million, to an array of organizations throughout the country. First Lady Michelle Obama says, "These Save America's Treasures grants will preserve the physical fabric of our history and the rich diversity of America's story, as told by its artists, scholars, and other notable figures. These awards also honor the hundreds of volunteers, organizations, and communities whose energy and investment are ensuring that this national legacy endures for generations to come."