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Earliest-known Eiko & Koma film discovered and preserved

Dance Heritage Coalition initiative is helped by Chicago Film Archives and New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

New York City – The Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC) is pleased to announce the exciting discovery of the earliest existing film footage of Eiko & Koma performing. The film, found last month among the company’s records during the Dance Heritage Coalition’s inventory of Eiko & Koma’s legacy materials, has been stabilized and digitized, and is now viewable again through the generosity of Nancy Watrous and Anne Wells at the Chicago Film Archives.

The mysterious and unassuming single reel of 16mm film was identified with the help of Tanisha Jones, director of the Archive of the Recorded Moving Image in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. It turned out to be a lost film documenting Eiko & Koma in Amsterdam circa 1973 performing *White Dance* - the title used by the duo for all their performance events from 1972-1974.

The 12-minute silent film consists of a series of short segments documenting Eiko & Koma performing a variety of material both solo and together. It also captures the pair’s informal interactions offstage. This footage, as the earliest-known example of Eiko & Koma’s dance work, illuminates an under-documented time in their career and captures the budding of the pair’s artistic partnership. The short vignettes of movement, while raw and unrefined, clearly show the pair’s signature choreographic style, albeit in embryonic form. Unfortunately, little information is known about the film itself including the title, who made it, or exactly when and where it was made.

Despite the casual storage and housing, the film is in good condition, having experienced only minor color fading and mild surface abrasions. Upon hearing about this discovery, Nancy Watrous generously offered the expertise and resources of the Chicago Film Archives, which is a leader in film preservation. Their capable staff stabilized the reel by inspecting, cleaning, and rehousing it. They also digitized the film, which allows the material to be easily watched and saves the original item from the wear and tear of handling and viewing. Thanks to Nancy Watrous and Anne Wells at the Chicago Film Archives, this precious historical dance treasure is now safely preserved for the future.

DHC Executive Director Libby Smigel expressed appreciation for the assistance that both the Chicago Films Archives and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Division provided free of charge in identifying and preserving the film. Smigel said, “Without

the collaborative contributions of the Dance Division and the Chicago Film Archives, this film would sit unidentified, unpreserved, and inaccessible. Both organizations deserve the gratitude of the entire dance field for contributing their specialized expertise to saving the seminal records of Eiko & Koma's performance career.”

The discovery was made during an inventory of the company's materials conducted by DHC Preservation Fellow Patsy Gay with the help of dance scholar Rosemary Candelario. In addition to providing the first comprehensive inventory of Eiko & Koma's materials, this project involves identifying and remedying conservation concerns and improving workflow arrangements. It lays the groundwork for future preservation of E&K's archives and allows the artists a major role in shaping their own artistic legacy. Since the summer of 2011, the DHC has conducted five inventories of key dance companies' collections in San Francisco and New York City. Funding for these projects was provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

For more information about collections assessments and inventories that the Dance Heritage Coalition provides, visit: www.danceheritage.org/assessment.html

For more information about film preservation and the Chicago Film Archives, visit : www.chicagofilmarchives.org/ For information on their project to save the legacy of Chicago dance treasure Ruth Page, see: www.chicagofilmarchives.org/news/cfa-awarded-nea-grant-to-process-ruth-page-collection

For more information about the NYPL Jerome Robbins Dance Division, along with the Division's Archive of the Recorded Moving Image, visit: www.nypl.org/locations/lpa/jerome-robbins-dance-division

To learn more about Eiko & Koma's life and work, visit: www.eikoandkoma.org

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