

Matrix of the Artist and Archivist's Duet: Partnerships in Our Dance Heritage

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Abstract

Improvements to the preservation field have been made, but less attention has focused on the functional partnership between the “Artist” who creates and documents the product, and the “Archivist” who preserves and shares the product. This paper explores how the partners can better understand each other and work collaboratively to develop useful materials and broad access to them. Relationship principles anchoring the partnership are introduced. Application of these principles can be realized by using the *tool kit* each partner brings and by *right brain/left brain* processing preferences. Finally, strategies to benefit the preservation field are explored which include: the need for expertise; building new content; and increased visibility and awareness.

Introduction

Dance has long struggled with establishing techniques for documenting its artistic legacies, best practices in preserving the materials, and means of annotating the creative process for future generations of dancers and audiences. Greater competency in documentation methods has contributed to a high quality of capturing the breathtaking physicality and beauty of dance. A ripple effect of this advancement is observed, in part, from the appeal of television dance shows and films, and dance postings on internet exchanges such as MySpace and YouTube exciting the interest of millions of fans.¹ Taking stock of other milestones achieved in the past decade enables perspective about the current state of the preservation field.

History of Preservation Efforts

Images of American Dance: Documenting and Preserving a Cultural Heritage (Keens, 1991) is the pioneering report that thrust the issue of cultural heritage forward and mapped directions for documentation and preservation efforts. The National Initiative to Preserve America's Dance (NIPAD) and SAVE AS: DANCE, sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts during the 1990s, specifically addressed dance preservation and the role of media as a

¹ *Dancing with the Stars* drew 22.8 million viewers per EW.com report. *So You Think You Can Dance?* attracted 7.7 million viewers per The Nielsen Company report. SYTYCD is directed by Matthew Diamond, *Emmy Award*-winning director of *Dance in America* segments and the *Dancemaker* film, sets new standards of excellence in filming dance for network television.

documentary tool. Cora Mirikitani, Program Officer responsible for The Pew Charitable Trust local and national dance initiatives during that period, recalled *American Canvas* that articulated “dance demands special handling if it is to remain extant (p.32).” Best practices were the focus of writings *After Images* newsletters, *Collaborative Editing Project to Document Dance* (Levine, 2001), *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* (Mitoma and Zimmer 2003), *A Guide to Archival Collaboration* (Elfenbein 2003) and *Documenting Dance, a Practical Guide* (Smigel 2006). From the viewpoint of national cultural policy, dance preservation has gained visibility through the National Endowment for the Arts’ *American Masterpieces: Dance*, the *Save America’s Treasures*, and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funding of archival assessments by Dance Heritage Coalition and the pilot program “Secure Media Network.” Overall the progress has been notable. Sylvia Waters, Artistic Director of Ailey II, expressed her belief in the importance of dance resources. Dance history is there to be explored; however, she feels powerless to force her Ailey II dancers to do it. Archivists have vested interest in cultural heritage, but an equal measure of value, appreciation, and participation is not always shared by the artists. How can these partners better understand each other and work collaboratively to develop useful materials and the broad access to them?

Purpose of the Paper

The three key players in the learning continuum² of preservation are the artist who creates and documents product, the archivist who preserves and shares the product, and the public who benefits from access to the artistic legacy and materials. With these prescribed roles in mind, this paper explores the partnership between the “Artist” (creators and performers) and the “Archivist” (curators and librarians of dance collections). Some principles and factors are examined having impact on the Artist and Archivist as individuals and also on the partnership. Later, options for moving forward are considered in context of three general themes: need for expertise; improved efforts to build new content; and increased visibility and awareness. The themes were identified by Archivists/Librarians and Individual Artists in the Dance Heritage Coalition’s *Results of Field Study* report. Various points and questions relevant to these themes are offered for consideration by members at the 2010 National Dance Heritage Leadership Forum.

Matrix of the Artist and Archivist Duet

The Artist and Archivist partnership, like the right pairing of dancers in a *duet*, is constructed by the interplay of certain factors. The platform is the basic relationship principles of listening, communicating, and learning to respect, value, and trust each other. Application of these principles is formed by using the *tool kit* each partner brings of agenda, distinct language, and techniques of process cultivated by their professional spheres. The *tools* must be used as instruments shaping facets of the relationship, not as wedges moving the partners apart. The partnership is also influenced by predisposition toward behavior connected to brain processing characteristics in the gathering, focusing and processing of information. As presented in *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards, the typical Artist’s *right brain* characteristics manifest as intuitive, non-verbal, often non-temporal, holistic perception housed

² The learning continuum descriptions were cited in the *White Paper Topics 2009* document provided by the Dance Heritage Coalition.

within a culture of highly social interaction perhaps a vestige of the group training mentality of the dance class. The typical Archivist's *left brain* tendencies present as analytical, verbal dependent, time-dictated, and sequential methods of organization that occur within the formalities of a hierarchal structure. The partners must recognize and attempt to accommodate these characteristics; otherwise, a breakdown happens in listening, communicating and learning. Dynamics of the partnership can also be affected by the type of interaction and the expectations associated with it. The inevitable push and pull occurs if needs are not verbalized clearly, one partner dictates with heavy hand, or the spirit of compromise is not planted. Finding the balance of reciprocity is integral to a successful partnership.

For purposes of this paper, examples of Artists and Archivists interactions are explored in two scenarios: *research* and *legacy*.³ The *research* scenario is often initiated by the Artist who is seeking to obtain information. Embarking on an introductory type of interaction like this allows the Artist to personally experience and gain familiarity with the mission critical work of the institution, database and organization of the materials, and preferred formats and forms of materials. The Archivist gains from cultivating a new relationship with the Artist, observing their research behaviors, and obtaining insight to their creative process. *Research* is a simple collaboration presenting minimal challenges to the partners. It can become a springboard to other collaboration opportunities. Eiko Otake described a 1998 commissioning project, *Breath*, with the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The success of that project established a positive connection and, subsequently, it was determined Eiko & Koma's archives would be housed at NYPL.

The *legacy* scenario can be initiated by the Archivist who is seeking to acquire archives or artistic assets. This is a more complex relationship to foster and sustain. Establishing common ground early on is extremely important to brokering this scenario; both partners must be motivated to listen and negotiate key issues on the table. *Legacy* scenario benefits from a prior Artist and Archivist interaction, because the partnership commences with familiar history. Sometimes despite the best of intentions, the fit of the partners do not serve the purpose of the collaboration. Selby Schwartz, company manager of Alonzo King's LINES Ballet, recalled an interaction between Mr. King and Museum of Performance and Design. MPD wished to interview Mr. King to include in their "Legacy" oral history project. MPD's interview protocol did not align with Mr. King's vision of how to describe his personal history or that of the company. Although this project did not proceed, other collaborations are quite possible. Jean Davidson, Executive Director of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, gave another perspective. Mr. Jones has not identified where his archives will be housed. Several offers have come from prospective repositories, but "none of them are yet what we want to do and our archives are not in good enough shape to hand over. We also are hesitant to give something away that may have a value to it in the future." The examples display the importance of understanding and accommodating the interplay of factors necessary to activate a partnership.

Options for Moving Forward

Encouraging Artist and Archivist partnerships are a critical piece in devising a robust preservation field. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women, commented

³ These terms were suggested by Cora Mirikitani describing the scenarios between Artists and Archivists.

that research is a strong part of her process and she has worked with an archivist. Jean Davidson stated “our archival materials are used mostly when we license works, which means by other staff members and universities. Other professionals utilize our archives more than Bill does.” It should be noted that when dances are revived or reconstructed⁴ the preferred method is the artist-to-artist oral transmission of knowledge. Barbara Dufty, Executive Director of Trisha Brown Dance Company, explained Ms. Brown is not involved in revivals of dances and to her knowledge Ms. Brown has not collaborated with an Archivist. The assistants care for and remount the repertoire from videotapes and notebook logs. Dick Caples, Executive Director of Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, said Mr. Lubovitch often researches composers and music when creating a new work, but he has not worked with an Archivist.

In April 2009, Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC) sent an electronic survey to 1,000 individuals in field and 161 responded to it. Out of those respondents, 30 were Artists and 106 self-identified as the “academic” community of Archivists, Librarians, Educators, Historians, Scholars and Critics. The intention of the *Results of Field Survey* report was to provide DHC with information to develop vision, goals and strategies for the next decade. The *Results of Field Survey* identified the general needs of constituents as: greater ease and availability of materials; greater demand for access to materials; larger quantity of materials; and enhanced diversity in the field. It also suggested priorities specific to Artists and Archivists:

- Need for expertise
- Improved efforts to build new content
- Increased visibility and awareness

Need for Expertise

The need for expertise is consequential to successful preservation programs. Expertise is examined within the following issues as they relate to greater capacity and productivity of the Artist and Archivist partnership:

1. Documentation practices by more Artists
2. Increasing access to information
3. Planning the legacy of artistic assets
4. Awareness of ‘fair use’ practices
5. Evaluating the preservation learning continuum

1. Documentation Practices by More Artists. There is need to encourage more Artists to document their work, especially those whose genre, form, or style is underrepresented in dance collections. Despite advancements in the past decade, the major obstacles remain somewhat the same: lack of funding, need for dedicated staff and time, appropriate methodology to film/video the work, and rapidity of software and equipment becoming obsolete.⁵ Regarding funding, preservation monies are limited and the majority supports projects by the major ballet and

⁴ For this paper a “revival” means a restaging directed by the choreographer or their company, and “reconstruction” refers to a dance rebuilt by one or more methods.

⁵ Dawn Stoppiello commented that Troika Ranch’s early technologies are outdated. To remount and document those works she must overhaul the computer, its operating system, software, hardware devices such as sensory systems, and video projectors. Her best documentation experience was a 2-year Creative Campus Innovations grant with Lied Center, and University of Nebraska, Lincoln, using five HD cameras and mobile unit truck where live editing was directed.

modern dance companies. The rest of the Artists are left to struggle on their own dime so, inevitably, documentation tasks get placed on the shelf.

- What compelling case statement can stimulate new streams of grant support from private and public sources to support a wider range of projects by a broader range of Artists and genres?
- Is there value in a multi-year funding approach to more effectively mobilize projects addressing under-represented genres, individual artists or small companies, or Artists whose work is not easily categorized?

Regarding documentation methodology, information exists in writings but apparently those materials are not getting to the target reader or the writings are not comprehensible. Dick Caples was the only person who used *Documenting Dance*. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar was not aware of any documentary guides so she devised her own 14-point “Repertory Documentation Project” document. Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company’s approach is to document all performances with a company camera, a task overseen by the Associate Artistic Director. The company hires professionals to film its premieres. When Barbara Dufty began working for Trisha Brown in June 2008, the practice was to videotape the rehearsals and assemble notebook logs to memorialize choreography and dancer notes from that session. *Documenting Dance* was not on Ms. Brown’s radar. Company tapes and documentation items were stored in boxes, programs and reviews were in files, and it was not unusual for “masters” of tapes to be used in rehearsals. Ms. Dufty’s current effort is establishing preservation and catalog systems. An executive director with the expertise in archival matters is highly unusual. It highlights the need to facilitate expertise in both the Artists and their key administrator/staff.

- Is this a micro issue addressed through Archivist to Artist mentoring, or workshops conducted both in-person and virtually, or in symposium settings? How would training address differences in dance genres, and the varying needs of a small versus the large ensemble repertoire?
- Where might funding be found to facilitate this expertise?
- Or, is this a macro issue involving systemic improvements to the communication channels and/or instituting aggressive marketing campaigns?

2. Increasing Access to Information. Access-related expertise is reported in *Results of Field Study* as the need for user-friendly and accessible databases (p. 8). Literature exists regarding information-seeking behavior, but only two graduate theses were identified studying the research behavior of dancers.⁶ Not all Artists have the knowledge and skills to navigate archival database systems. The research task becomes more frustrating when materials are scattered in different sections of a collection, housed at different institutions or at out-of-state or international repositories. This raises the concern of looking beyond our borders to establish greater cooperation with international Archivists and repositories. Dr. Claudia Jeschke cited a reconstruction project with an American colleague that used Barnard College dance students. The language barrier was not an issue in this collaboration. Based on her experience, the key to a successful international collaboration is “the artists must be deeply interested in archives.” The

⁶ Dawn M. Grattino, *A Survey of the Information-Seeking Practices of Dance Professionals in Ohio*. July, 1996. David Piper. *Researching the Information Seeking Behavior of Dancers* 2009.

effort to research can be further impeded by unfamiliarity with the organization of materials. Even if the Artist learns one organizational method, that procedure may not be followed at other institutions.

- How can a universal and user-friendly database system be established?
- Would DHC lead this effort, and if not, what entity might undertake the project? Should international Archivists be invited to the table initially or included in a second phase planning? Should input be obtained from key Artists and funders in the planning process? How might this be facilitated?
- Is there value in a visual search component, a dance genealogy by genre, as an alternative means for Artists and the public to identify dancers and materials?

3. Planning the Legacy of Artistic Assets. Estate planning is an important aspect of expertise and a sensitive topic to Artists. Contemplating one's mortality is unpleasant, not to mention facing the arduous decisions about artistic legacy succession. Some choreographers are too busy or simply avoid thinking about it. Alonzo King completed his estate planning, and it was more complicated and involved than he would have guessed. He and others agree it would be helpful to have an estate planning template or procedural guide to understand the legacy decisions, legal issues, and tax consequences that must be considered. Ms. Dufty was Executive Director for Meredith Monk for 26 years, and she helped prepare Ms. Monk's archives for transfer to NYPL. Back then, she consulted with Paul Epstein and others regarding estate planning. Ms. Brown has not designated a repository for her archives although inquiries have been received. A Legacy Committee has been formed with the goal of completing their task by May 2010. At that point, Ms. Dufty can initiate fundraising to cover expenses of the estate plan.

- Is it feasible to provide Artists with estate planning template formats addressing the concerns of the small and large companies?
- Is there an organization with the existing capability to assume this task? Might this be a three-year pilot program instituted in key cities before it can be replicated on a regional or statewide basis?
- What delivery or communication system would ensure broad circulation of the templates? Might a marketing plan be conceived that also provides for introductory networking opportunities between the Archivists to Artists?

4. Awareness of Fair Use Practices. The *Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use of Dance-Related Materials* booklet offers recommendations addressing library use policies, inconsistent or restrictive donor contracts, and copyright issues (p. 5). When the publication becomes more widely known, it will be interesting to observe how the recommendations are received. The Artist's natural inclination is to protect their work, while a priority of the Archivist is procuring archives and materials with broad and immediate access to practitioners and the public. Certainly boosting the importance and value of dance collections can leverage the position of institutions regarding the acquisition of archives and materials, and the tacit acceptance of 'fair use' practices.

- What strategy provides broad dissemination of the Fair Use recommendations?
- How can the understanding and approval from Artists be facilitated?

5. Re-evaluating the Learning Continuum. Although somewhat tangential to the subject of expertise, it may be appropriate to re-examine the learning continuum. Advances in technologies coupled with the new generation's access behaviors, values, and expectations may have rendered the continuum paradigm as limited and antiquated in respect to building a stronger preservation ecosystem.

- Is there value in adding another partner to the learning continuum? Funders exert a great deal of influence on Artists and Archivists individually and also in their partnership; should they be acknowledged as a critical pillar of a healthy preservation field?
- Are there other categories of participants in the preservation ecosystem who can enhance the effectiveness of the learning continuum?

Improved Efforts to Build New Content

New Content is discussed in *Results of Field Study* as: 1) Comments from respondents about the definition of “dance” being too narrow (p. 11); 2) The “continuing hunger for more material – both new material and the digitization of existing endangered archives (p. 12).”

1. Diversifying the Definition of “Dance”. There is a need to widen the definition of “dance” specifically of heritage-based, folk, popular and orphan repertory; a better mix of small and large companies; and the balance of historical and contemporary dances.

- Will DHC assume leadership in expanding the definition of “dance” and developing criteria for new content in dance collections?
- Would the expansion process be best served by a funded study? Or, are there alternatives to facilitating a broader equitability and participation of Artists that the field will accept?
- If a new working definition of “dance” takes form, what types of networking interactions can be hosted between Archivists and Artists?

2. Developing New Practices for Contextual Materials. In *Securing Our Dance Heritage*, Allegra Fuller Snyder stated the need to strategize “the presentation of dance materials in a way that spawns new and creative uses” as being vital to the development of documentation (p. 13).” Ten years later, the issue is still on the table per *Results of Field Study* reporting on the need for “new practices that interface with new generation technological behavior (p. 8)” and the “repeated desire for more contextual material (p. 13).” It is necessary to acknowledge new technologies and new generation behaviors of things like “tweeting” and “vlogging” (video blogging) as indicative of instant messaging trends in obtaining information anywhere, anytime.

- Is the problem that writings about contextual materials are not understandable, or those writings are not reaching the Artists?
- New technologies and an appetite for user interface capability offers fresh opportunities to develop new materials and pathways of engaging with the public. How can Archivists assist Artists in creatively annotating their work and process for future practitioners and audiences, and be appropriate to the institution?

Increased Visibility and Awareness

Results of Field Study suggests the “dance community does not place sufficient emphasis on history, rushing always to produce the next new project rather than focus on preserving dance heritage and legacy (p. 11).” It is true that without new dance makers and forms of expression the art form does not evolve. Shifting to a more equitable balance of “new” and “historical” dances that are performed and seen by the public is possible if this tactic is reinforced by grants supporting preservation and by presenters willing to book companies not offering premieres.

- Can ‘visibility and awareness’ also be addressed by upgrading the reference of preservation as a “field” to institutionalizing it as a “system”?
- What key constituents must be engaged to increase appreciation for dance legacy?

The general lack of visibility in the field is cited in *Results of Field Survey* by the number of respondents requesting services the Dance Heritage Coalition already provides. “Among many of those who responded to the survey, there is a clear lack of understanding about DHC, its programs and role in the field (p. 13).” Access to more information and increased awareness also ranks high on the desired outcomes of a “successful strategy for accessing dance materials (p. 13).”

- How can preservation be repositioned as essential to the dance ecosystem? What internal and external strategies are needed to facilitate it?
- Is there value in DHC re-branding itself? And, should DHC consider building a new base of preservation constituents, outside of the member institutions?
- How might DHC mobilize its member institutions to participate as “institutional ambassadors in dance heritage,” hosting open houses, dance exhibitions, seminars that coincide with occasions like Dance or Arts Month? Might establishing “dance heritage ambassadors” comprised of key individuals at the regional and national levels infuse new energy and perspective to the importance of preservation?

Conclusion

Establishing a highly esteemed preservation system demands an all-hands-on-deck energy, commitment, and action. It is so easy to become inundated by daily affairs and lose perspective about how one’s imprint can contribute to a more robust preservation enterprise. Hopefully this paper stimulates reflection by the Artists and Archivists. But, they cannot do the heavy lifting alone. The dedicated resolve of all constituents is necessary to modify attitudes toward preservation from the “ugh” response to “ahhh!” The continuum of the past, present, and future of dance deserves to be brightly lit for future generations; and the torch is in our hands. The efficacy of the short and long term goals requires astute and expeditious passing of the torch to all the instrumental partners.

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