

SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT STATE OF FILM PRESERVATION

Sony Pictures Entertainment has taken a leadership role in film preservation and restoration.

Our program has broken new ground by creating a model for a collaborative effort on a national scale, the Film and Tape Preservation Committee with representation from LOC, UCLA, MOMA and the AFI.

SPE has also developed a pro-active financial support program for major American archives. Currently five institutions are funded annually. These funds directly support specific film preservation activities as well as public viewing to promote seeing films as they are intended on the motion picture screen.

Significant financial and staff resources have been concentrated on preserving the Columbia Pictures library consisting of over 3,000 full length feature films, shorts and serials, all of which have been released theatrically. Over the last three years, preservation work has been completed on 200 films, nitrate conversion of 420 films has been completed, and 12 films have undergone significant restoration.

SPE has dedicated resources to creating a state-of-the-art storage facility to strengthen inventory control over film elements worldwide and has prepared and implemented corporate policies to assure proper disaster recovery, quality control and asset management.

As a leader in new technologies SPE has initiated research into the impact of new technologies, such as high definition digital tape, to find positive contributions to film preservation.

Our position on film preservation focuses primarily in three areas:

- 1) The strong belief that a preservation partnership between the major motion pictures studios, film archives and technical specialists is required. We view our Film and Tape Preservation Committee as a model program.
- 2) A standard method for the planning and prioritization of preservation and restoration should be established. Preservation of existing film libraries should be prioritized.
- 3) New technologies will increasingly impact film preservation, as well as the storage and distribution of feature films. The film preservation community must carefully evaluate the impact of these changes and use new electronic and information technology to enhance the permanent recording of the picture and sound image - which is a critical part of our national heritage.

1. Our recommendation is for a well-defined, broad-based national partnership between the Library of Congress and National Film Preservation Board, archives, Studios, independent producers and the technical community, including SMPTE. SPE's Film and Tape Preservation Committee could be used as a model.

SPE recognizes that our commercial-driven requirements and the work of the preservation community should be integrated. The efforts of our Committee demonstrates that such an arrangement does work.

SPE established the corporate Film & Tape Preservation Committee in June, 1990 with the LOC, MOMA, UCLA and the AFI. This committee became a catalyst for accelerating film preservation, assisting in the prioritization of restoration projects for the Columbia Pictures library and preparing the groundwork for the identification of preservation issues on a national level and the development of resolutions to these issues.

A very important component has been the sharing of information and research. The partnership arrangement between SPE and these archives has made us all better problem solvers in the preservation area.

We do not advocate the creation of a central authority for governing preservation policy, whether it be public or private. Rather, a collective effort resulting in improved communication for on-going preservation projects, a shared database of information of films, guidelines for storing and preserving film and insights into new technological development.

2. An offshoot of the needs for a preservation partnership in the United States is the need for a clarification of priorities and increased planning of preservation and restoration projects.

One of SPE's first goals was to clarify what we were preserving and in what sequence our long list of candidates should be preserved. The enormity of the our library and the demands of the marketplace for high quality material for television broadcasting worldwide added to the inherent conflicts in the selection process.

We have established, with the help of our Committee, criteria for prioritization as well as a review procedure for restoration projects.

The most important preservation titles are based on the status of existing preprint elements. The primary criteria is the status of protection elements for a title. Nitrate conversions are prioritized since physical deterioration of elements forces all of us into a race against time to prevent permanent loss. Many of Columbia Pictures nitrate titles, totaling 840 products, fall into this category. To date, 50 percent of this library has been inspected and safety interpositive or fine-grains have been created. We have adopted a policy in which two safety elements are created, one for permanent storage and the other for commercial use such as creating video tape masters.

The next category is the manufacturing of protection elements for post 1950 films for which protection of the original material has not been created, has been lost or is in poor condition. Careful inventory and quality control is required to successfully implement this priority list.

More recent color film from the 1960's-1980's are also being examined due to color fading, an inherent long term preservation problem. SPE is beginning to focus on films in this area as well.

Restoration has an important preservation role. The improvement of films, defined as restoring a film to its original (domestic release) look and sound, is a time consuming and in many cases expensive process. Therefore, the selection process becomes as important as the actual restoration.

SPE and the Committee of archivists prioritize films based on need first and historical significance second. Similar to the restoration of historic buildings, we must pick and choose due to limited financial resources, the condition and the importance of the building or film.

We have found that good planning and analysis of a restoration project prior to starting work results in higher quality and cost effectiveness.

We require a detailed condition report of original material, a project scope with clarifies the work to be done, a forecast on what we can expect as a result of the restoration project and a cost estimate. There is a review process throughout the restoration and a series of screenings of the restored title prior to final approval.

Planning goes beyond individual projects. Pre-restoration planning also includes a high level of inventory control and quality control. To accomplish this, SPE has concentrated significant resources through its Film and Tape Operations Division to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to inventory all SPE film elements, which total at least 1 million cans of film. We are taking a long-term approach, carefully evaluating, inputting into our computer system and bar coding all film elements. We are also developing a quality control program to assure that preserved and restored elements remain in good condition. This is a massive effort requiring well thought out policies and procedures, technical experience and cooperation with our theatrical divisions.

3. New technologies must be integrated into the film preservation effort. In the long term, new electronic and data processing technologies will be an integral component of preservation. New technologies impact on film preservation is sometimes viewed skeptically by some members of the archival community. However, we all know that film, a photochemical process, does not last forever and color film fades with time.

New technologies impact film in three ways. First, as new electronic mediums are created the demand to use original film materials increases. Second, new technologies can, in theory, assist film preservation in correcting or enhancing film which cannot be accomplished through conventional means. Finally, these new digital mediums have a tremendous capacity to store information and will in the mid-term improve storage of the master material of theatrically released products.

In only 20 years, the deliver medium changed six times from 2 inch tapes, to 1 inch tapes, to various digital formats with high definition next in line. Each of these technological advances places demands on using film elements, paralleling the increased demand for higher quality picture and sound for the home video and television markets. This has been especially true for domestic pay television and European television customers. This creates an added responsibility for the Studios to carefully manage these important elements. SPE has strengthened its asset management policies including the creation of a YCM master and an archival inter-positive for every Columbia Pictures and TriStar Pictures release.

New technologies have a high potential in correcting film problems. Sony High Definition has taken a leadership role in working with the preservation of film on film via electronic processes. Sony High Definition firmly believes that high definition digital technologies will assist preservation of film and not replace film. We are currently working on an experimental basis with several library films ranging from cartoons to full length features, to enhance color fading. The goal is to see if we can rejuvenate faded or damaged images electronically.

Preservationists need to team up with engineers and other technical specialists working in this area. Rather than entrepreneurs deciding the path preservation takes, the preservation community needs to help direct this effort. The preservation partnership, another key area already discussed, can be a catalyst for resource integration. SPE and the Film and Tape Preservation Committee have already taken the first steps by examining Sony High Definition's efforts in film preservation.

Lastly, the long-term storage and viability of film needs careful assessment. We are not in significant danger now, however, as the years accumulate the pressures for replacing the information stored on film will grow. Electronic mediums such as high definition or compression technologies currently in development may be the answer.

Whether they are or are not is still yet to be known. It remains imperative that the preservation, archivist and creative community become integrated into this "engineered" process in order to preserve the creative nature of this art form.

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