

Preserving Your Archives

As part of our mission to build the Philadelphia Jazz Archives, we want to make sure that local musicians take good care of their own personal archives, in the hope that the materials will someday become part of the Archives. Items that may seem inconsequential—newspaper clippings, concert programs and flyers, old audio or video tapes—are actually important in telling the broader story of Philadelphia jazz. Here are some guidelines for preserving your personal archives.

The single most effective thing you can do for your archival materials is to keep them in a proper physical environment—a secure, dry place with stable, moderate temperature and humidity levels, and no direct sunlight. Constant or major fluctuations in temperature and humidity can wreak havoc on archival materials, while sunlight can cause irreversible fading. Damp basements or attics with extreme temperature changes are the worst. The ideal environment is a temperature of 70° F and relative humidity of 50%, with as little fluctuation in these levels as possible.

Audio and video tapes in various formats are especially vulnerable. In addition to keeping them in a proper environment, recorded media such tapes, LPs, CDs and DVDs should be stored upright, not laid flat or piled on top of each other, and in proper housing to protect them from dust and dirt. Paper-based materials and photographs should be stored in acid-free folders, envelopes, and boxes, if possible. Regular cardboard boxes and manila folders and envelopes are made with acidic ingredients that can migrate into and deteriorate archival materials. Acid-free containers are expensive, however, so a good alternative is to put important items in mylar sleeves or interleave them with sheets of acid-free copy paper, which will provide some basic protection.

These are some basic steps you can take to ensure that your archives are preserved for posterity. If you have any questions or would like to discuss donating your materials to the Philadelphia Jazz Archives, please contact archivist Jack McCarthy at jacksnotes88@verizon.net or 610-639-2164 and director Suzanne Cloud at info@suzanne.cloud or 610-745-301.