



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the DC Cowboys Dance Company Records

NMAH.AC.1312

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.

2014



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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	DC Cowboys Dance Company Records
<b>Date:</b>	undated 1994-2012
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.1312
<b>Creator:</b>	DC Cowboys Dance Company (Creator)
<b>Extent:</b>	7.5 Cubic feet (22 boxes, 3 oversize folders)
<b>Language:</b>	Collection text is in English.
<b>Summary:</b>	The records of the DC Cowboys Dance Company, an all-male, gay, non-profit dance company based in Washington, DC. that was active from 1994-2012. They performed nationally and internationally live and on television, "celebrating diversity through dance."

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Kevin P. Platte, founder and Artistic and Executive Director of DC Cowboys Dance Company in 2013.

### Processing Information

Processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archives specialist, September 2013; supervised by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, archivist.

### Preferred Citation

DC Cowboys Dance Company Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

### Restrictions

This collection is open for research use. Gloves must be worn when handling unprotected photographs, negatives, and slides.

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## Biographical / Historical

"History of the DC Cowboys Dance Company - Celebrating diversity through dance"

The DC Cowboys Dance Company, an all-male, gay dance company, entertained audiences around the world from 1994 to 2012. Internationally acclaimed, the DC Cowboys specialized in providing exciting, high-energy, jazz-style, dance entertainment which spanned all musical genres, from contemporary country to club dance party, pop, to classic Broadway numbers for all types of occasions. Shows were customized to the venue—both gay-specific and mainstream events—and featured anywhere from one song to multiple sets of three to four songs each. Combining a little traditional country-western with jazz, musical theater and a masculine sex appeal, the DC Cowboys' high-energy choreography made the company one of the most-sought after gay dance groups in the world.

Founder and Artistic Director Kevin Platte started the dance company in August 1994 after seeing a similar gay, country-western dance group in California. Platte recruited 11 dancers—mostly friends—from a Washington, D.C., gay, country-western bar named Remington's. He approached the best dancers based on watching them two-step and line-dance at the bar. The dancers formed the troupe for the sole purpose of performing at the Atlantic States Gay Rodeo Association's (ASGRA) annual rodeo in Washington, D.C., in September 1994.

Platte thought the performance would be a one-time event. But based on an overwhelming reception, the dancers decided to continue the group. This required weekly rehearsals, the creation of a dance "repertoire" and a larger commitment from the dancers. Of the original 12 members, only six were up to the task. These six original members then had to find more dancers and identify other performance venues. Mainstay venues soon included the Capital Pride Festival every June and the Atlantic Stampede Gay Rodeo event every September.

In September 1995, *Metro Weekly* placed them on the cover of their magazine, giving them greater exposure and more clout. The Cowboys used this coverage as a catalyst to build the brand and identity. All the while, the DC Cowboys remained volunteers and amateurs, performing solely for the love of it. Each dancer maintained a "day job," and the group only rehearsed in the evenings once or twice a week. As the warmer months seemed to be their busiest, the dancers would use the colder months to build up the repertoire and practice. Every year, rehearsals would cease for the months of November and December for the existing dancers. However new recruits that were successful in the annual auditions attended "bootcamp" rehearsals during those months to learn some of the existing repertoire. In January, the existing and new members started rehearsing together as the new season began.

During the early years, the dancers paid for all expenses out of their own pockets, and monthly dues were collected to pay for group expenses. The group would often pay for the opportunity to perform. To supplement these expenses, the group began fundraising through a monthly bar night at different gay nightclubs. Once their reputation grew, venues and events began to pay for the company's entertainment services and patron club members donated funds to support the organization and their mission. These funds allowed the organization to pay for all of their expenses including dancer costuming. In addition, the group sold merchandise which included T-shirts, performance DVDs as well as their sexy DC Cowboys calendars. Three of the more popular calendars featured the dancers without clothes in artistic poses and included the "making of the calendar" DVD.

In 1996, Platte added a charitable element to the organization. He created a mission statement which said the company would provide free entertainment to any HIV/AIDS charitable organization. Over the years, the company also directly raised funds for HIV/AIDS organizations by sharing the profits of their calendar sales. The DC Cowboys raised millions of dollars through performances for national and local non-profit organizations such as: Washington, D.C. AIDS Ride; Washington, D.C. AIDS Walk; Chase Brexton Clinic of Baltimore, Maryland; Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry; Human Rights Campaign; Whitman Walker Clinic of Washington, D.C.; Food and Friends of Washington, D.C.; Mautner Project; Gay Latino Benefits in Metro D.C.; Harford County AIDS/Cancer Benefit, Maryland; NYFD Benefit for the New York City Fire Department.

In 1996, the company received a grant from the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, honoring the company for its valued contribution to the Washington, D.C. arts community. The company always maintained a tax-deductible status as a 501c3 non-profit organization with a small board of directors.

During their 18-year tenure, the DC Cowboys provided an outlet for gay artists and performers in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The company included 85 dancers, eight choreographers and three stage-managers. The company performed at 458 events in five countries. The DC Cowboys' crowd-pleasing, sexy dance style had been described as "Will Rogers Follies meets Bob Fosse." The group famously described themselves on *America's Got*

*Talent* in 2008 as "Think Brokeback meets Broadway," which became a popular line echoed around the world. Their growth and popularity were attributed to their unique and high quality entertainment which was often copied in other cities but never equalled. In addition the dancers were talented, good-looking men who were friendly and approachable to their many fans. Their farewell season tour in 2012 visited all of their favorite performance venues and locations around the world and was dedicated to their fans who were instrumental to their success.

Typical performance venues included Pride Festivals in New York City, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Charlotte, North Carolina; Headliners on the Gay Rodeo circuit in Washington, D.C., Las Vegas, San Diego, Atlanta, Chicago, Calgary, and Texas; Halloween in New Orleans; Mr. Gay All-American Finals; Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, Washington, D.C.; concerts and events; Whitman Walker Volunteer Appreciation at Constitution Hall, Washington, D.C.; PFLAG's Gala Dinner, Washington, D.C.; HRC (Human Rights Campaign) Leadership Dinner cruise aboard the Spirit of Washington, Washington, D.C.; Human Rights Campaign National Dinner, Washington, D.C. - special reception for major donors; Annual Chef's Best Dinner & Auction for Food and Friends, Washington, D.C..

Performance highlights included *America's Got Talent* television show, season 3, NBC, semifinalists (2008); Closing Ceremonies of the Gay Games VII at Wrigley Field in Chicago (2006); RSVP's Caribbean Fantasy gay cruise (2005); Arts grant recipient from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts (1996); The Sziget Festival in Budapest, Hungary (2009--012); *Dales' Great Getaway* television show, ITV London, England (2012); *The Podge and Rodge* television show, RTE, Dublin, Ireland (2010)."

#### **Source**

This history of the DC Cowboys Dance Company was supplied by its founder, Kevin Platte.

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## **Scope and Contents**

The DC Cowboys Dance Company Records contain the business and financial papers of the company, such as memoranda and correspondence; choreography routines; printed materials such as press releases and articles; fundraising materials; photographs; audiovisual materials; and the pre-recorded music used for their various dance routines. The records are arranged chronologically in three series.

**Series 1: Company Files, 1994-2013, undated**, is arranged chronologically by year and maintains the original order received from the donor. The files cover the entire life of the company and its performances within the United States as well as internationally. The files contain correspondence, contracts, dance routines, fundraising initiatives, event information and advertising materials, travel and lodging arrangements, tourist information, and photographs.

**Series 2: Financial, 1996-2011, undated**, is arranged chronologically. The files contain receipts, money receipt books, financial statements, balance sheets and those materials related to the financial aspect of running the company.

**Series 3: Audiovisual, 1994-2012, undated**, contains compact discs (189) of pre-recorded music used for the company's various dance routines. The music was prepared for each booking and most often identified with the title of the booking and the date. Much of the music on these discs is under copyright since they are recordings done by original artists or professional covers of songs that were contemporary with the company's performance during any given year. There are also DVDs (five) detailing the production of various fund raising DC Cowboys calendars and one audio cassette tape.

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## **Arrangement**

This collection is divided into three series.

**Series 1: Company Files, 1994-2013, undated**

**Series 2: Financial, 1996-2011, undated**

**Series 3: Audiovisual, 1994-2012, undated**

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Cowboys
- Dance
- Dance companies
- Gay business enterprises
- Gays
- Homosexuality

Types of Materials:

- Articles -- 1990-2000
- Articles -- 21st century
- Business records -- 1990-2000
- Business records -- 21st century
- Compact discs
- Correspondence -- 1990-2000
- Correspondence -- 21st century
- DVDs
- Financial records -- 1990-2000
- Financial records -- 21st century
- Photographs -- 1990-2000
- Photographs -- 21st century
- Press releases -- 1990-2000
- Press releases -- 21st century

## Container Listing

### Series 1: Company Files, 1994 - 2013, undated

Box 1, Folder 1	Publicity, 1994
Box 1, Folder 2	<a href="#">Photographs, 1994</a>
Box 21, Folder 12	<a href="#">[Kevin Platte with his cowboy hat : digital photoprint.], circa 2012</a> 1 Item (Ink on paper.; 10.1" x 8".) Collector: DC Cowboys Dance Company Language: English. Notes: AC1312-0000003 (AC Scan) Names: Platte, Kevin Topic: Hats Cowboys Dance Dance companies Gay business enterprises Gays Homosexuality Genre/Form: Inkjet prints Photographs -- 2010-2020 -- Color photoprints -- Digital
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, 1994
Box 1, Folder 4	Repertoire, 1994 - 2000, undated
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, 1995 - 1996
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Box 1, Folder 15	Garage and Other Side Nightclub (Norfolk, Virginia), 1995
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Box 1, Folder 28	Rodeo (Del Mar, California), 1996
Box 1, Folder 29	International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics Championships (Washington, D.C.), 1996
Box 2, Folder 1	Notes, 1997
Box 2, Folder 2	Dance sheets, 1997
Box 2, Folder 3	Contracts, 1997
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Box 2, Folder 8	Mid-Atlantic Leather Competition (Washington, D.C.), 1997

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Box 2, Folder 28	Second Millenium, Latino Community AIDS Service Organizations (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 29	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry, 1999
Box 2, Folder 30	Splash Dance '99 (San Diego, California), 1999
Box 2, Folder 31	Atlantic Stampede (Montgomery County, Maryland), 1999

Box 2, Folder 32	Reel Affirmations (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 33	Big City Hoedown (Toronto, Canada), 1999
Box 2, Folder 34	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 35	<a href="#">Spring Fever (Baltimore, Maryland), 1999</a>
Box 2, Folder 35 (?)	<a href="#">Spring Fever Good for One Dance with the D.C. Cowboy of Your Choice [coupon], 1999</a> 1 Item (Ink on paper.; 2.6" x 4.4".) Collector: DC Cowboys Dance Company Language: English. Notes: AC1312-0000001 (AC Scan) Topic: Cowboys Dance Dance companies Gay business enterprises Gays Homosexuality Genre/Form: Coupons
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