

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

"T.V. or not T.V."

*The state of preservation for television and video
product*

*For presentation to the Library Of Congress' public hearing on the
current state of American television and video preservation.*

March 6, 1996

I was surfing through the channels of my television set the other evening and came across an older looking television show. It looked horrible. Faded, scratched and generally unappealing. I must admit that my chest tightened up a bit and I became anxious.

"Oh my God" I thought, "Is this one of ours?"

Fortunately, it wasn't. But it does serve as a reminder that film preservation does not stop with features. Television programming and videotape material must also be included. MGM currently holds over 2,600 hours of television programming including such titles as *The Outer Limits* (both old and new), *The Patty Duke Show*, *Sea Hunt*, *In The Heat Of The Night*, *Fame*, *thirtysomething* and *The Pink Panther Cartoons*. All of the nitrate material has been transferred to safety film and then the safety film duplicated. Approximately 80% of it has been transferred to videotape and of that amount, approximately 30% is on digital videotape.

MGM currently is in the process of transferring the remainder of this product to component digital videotape. We expect this to take another 2 years.

It is MGM policy to conform negative on all new T.V. product that is finished on videotape (both episodic and feature length). If titles and opticals were not created on film, we evaluate each product on a case by case basis to determine if we assemble negative without these for now or go ahead and create film negative digitally for cutting into the original negative. We have our eye on emerging technology and changing broadcast standards. As an example, for this product, we output all material squeezed on component digital videotape so it can be formatted for both 4x3 and 16x9.

Also, we hold several shows from between 5 and 10 years ago where no negative was conformed. We have recently approved a plan for the negative conforming for these episodes to be done over the next 2 years. These will include digitally output negative for titles and opticals for integration into the original negative. These will be complete and ready for component digital transfer soon after.

For product that was shot on video, we create a component digital master for both NTSC and PAL and make 2 digital protection clones for each format. These are then geographically separated. MGM, at this point in time, operates under the assumption that digital tape stock holds up approximately 10 years. We will revisit these tapes at 7 year intervals for new copies.

Television is a different business than feature films. The methodology is different and the thinking is different. It is fast paced, hurried and even more deadline oriented than features. The conditioning and thinking is hurry and get the tape to the network or the satellite uplink. Then move onto the next episode.

Electronic editing, fiber optic lines and other digital tools allow for the T.V. producer to do more in a shorter amount of time. It seems to me that this is the issue that needs to be addressed. In this described environment, it is easy to not address the issue preservation. It is up to the owner to take this jumble of material and sort it out in a cohesive, methodology that promotes preservation. This thinking needs to be built into the process. It must be thought of as naturally as mixing. It must be as comfortable as editing.

I sat at this table 3 years ago discussing film preservation where I expressed our commitment to it and briefly outlined how we go about that. Today, MGM is a very different company. It is bigger and more diverse and vital. We now have 4 T.V. shows in production with many more in development. In the last year, we have produced 7 films made for television. 3 years ago, we had 1 episodic show. Period. Our commitment to television has grown with our company. So to is our commitment to the preservation of the moving image, be it feature or television.

I am grateful for the occasion these hearings bring to share information with one another and explore issues for preservation. It is very easy for us to get caught up in our own worlds of work and feel like we are making decisions in isolation, when we really aren't. This somehow brings us a bit closer. Thank you for that opportunity.