

Some Thoughts on the Care of Your Dance Clothes

The dance clothes that you wear into the Dance Circle represent the combined efforts of you, your family, and your friends. You wear the clothes put together by the efforts of these people to bring honor to yourself and to these people. These things that you wear should be kept in an excellent state and/or condition of repair. You have an obligation to your family and friends. When you wear the clothes you are your family's representative. As their representative, you must feel a need to wear the clothes in their best condition.

It must be realized that your dance clothes represent a significant financial obligation. Your clothes can be very valuable depending on the amount of bead work, finger weaving, ribbon work, and jewelry used in the decorations. Something that is worth so much to your family should be properly cared for and respected.

It is typical to mix colors of the different pieces of your dress to create a vivid, coordinated effect from the many different and contrasting hues. The visual effect of the colors and designs of the ribbon work, bead work, and finger weaving used to decorate your outfit reflect both family and individual experience. The selections of color combinations, decorations and ornaments reflect the personality and individuality of the wearer.

Putting on your clothes should not be a rushed process. You should allow thirty to forty-five minutes for dressing. This helps in assuring that your outfit is put on correctly, and that all items of your dress have been properly secured.

When a person dresses for a dance, a friend should help him dress. They will help him put on everything in proper order. How the dancer looks is a reflection of the depth of respect and devotion he has for himself and what he wears.

A man's dance clothes are usually made by family members who try to acquire the best possible materials. A man who dances in the circle is said to be put there by his family or friends. When a dancer takes his seat in the circle his family or friends sit behind him. This helps to ensure that the dancer maintains his outfit correctly. Those who sit behind him make sure that each time the dancer sits, he does not accidentally sit on delicate parts of the dance clothes. They also may adjust any part of the clothes which may be falling out of place.

Several weeks prior to the dance the dancer should begin to check his outfit. The cloth parts should be hung out to air, be cleaned and pressed so as to not appear soiled or unkempt. At this time it would be important to check and repair any damaged edge beading for example. Check and mend or replace all ties. Moccasins, soles, thongs, bead work, sewing, should be checked. It is a good idea to replace the ties on a yearly basis. Check, clean and repair the bead work. A good idea to help maintain your moccasin shape is to fill them with paper or use shoe trees when your moccasins are not in use.

Your bells should be cleaned and polished. Make sure each bell is mounted securely. If you tie these on make sure the ties are replaced yearly.

Check the belts and ties that you use to secure your leggings,

clout and dragger to your waist. Replace these at least yearly. In my years of dancing I have seen several friends leave the dance arbor embarrassed because their clouts, dragger and leggings were falling off because a belt broke. An idea that I have used successfully is to secure my clouts, dragger and leggings to my waist with bands of cloth webbing. I try to use a cotton material as it tends to be softer and does not bind or chafe the waist. Called carpet binding, this material can be purchased from local carpet supply houses. Try to get the widest binding available. This material can be knotted and the ends tucked away easily. It also reduces the bulk of material around the waist.

You should have a clean, fresh shirt and matching accessories for each dance session. Please make sure they are also cleaned and pressed. They should not show stains. If soiled, they should be retired and new ones made. Your head band, if you wear one, should be a folded new, clean white handkerchief for each dance session. Use the old one to wipe your silver or clean your moccasins.

For those of you who wrap your fan handle, it does no good to put a soiled cloth around your fan handle to protect your bead work from the sweat of your hand. This cloth should be a new clean one for each dance session.

The most common items to come apart during a dance session are the bandoliers. These should be checked often for wearing of the wire strands and broken or chipped beads or pipes. If they need mending, do it early in the process of getting your clothes ready as this activity can take a lot of time. Those of you with beaded belts, check these and replace broken beads. Mend the mounting to the leather and the ties used to secure it to your waist.

One of the areas of your outfit that needs constant attention is your metal work, be it silver or brass. Tarnished metal work, must be kept clean and polished. Slides, armbands, bracelets, earrings, spreader, and drops should be checked and cleaned. It adds the extra sparkle that draws the eye to your fine clothes.

Your roach strings should be replaced often. If you use shoe lacing, make sure it is clean. If you use white, replace it after each dance session. Make sure your roach and spreader fit and the lacing that keeps them together is long enough and is in good condition. I cannot stress enough that all your ties and lacings be long enough to secure the pieces in place properly.

Your hand held items should be checked for damage. If you carry a mirror-board, make sure the mirror is not broken and that it is clean. Your blanket should be a Pendleton or a beaded blanket that is clean.

Always be prepared for the unforeseen problem. It is a good idea to carry in your case a small repair kit. Some of the items in this kit should be safety pins, of varying sizes, small knife, scissors, tape, leather thong, shoe lace, comb, wash cloth, handkerchief, and a few extra dollar bills.

This article was written in the hope that it will stimulate each of us to maintain and/or upgrade the high quality of our individual dance outfits, and to wear them properly.