

RADIO SHOW 3: THE JAPAN TOURS

Hello everyone. This is Everett Alan Lilly. Today is part 3 in my four-part series and it deals with the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover's Japan tours. These occurred in 1973 and 1975 in the days when bluegrass music was beginning to spread around the world. Following these two successful tours my father, Everett Lilly, made several more trips to Japan accompanying other acts he had booked including Bill Monroe, Jim and Jesse, and Doc Watson.

What precipitated these tours began some years earlier when Robert Tanaka and his brother, Jerry, appeared in a musical, "Holiday in Japan" at the Music Hall in Boston, MA. Following one of the performances Robert and Jerry visited the nearby Hillbilly Ranch where the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover appeared nightly. This introduction to the music had a profound impact on both Robert and Jerry. They were so taken in by this new music that they recorded some songs live and took those back to Japan and released a record. Upon returning to Japan Robert Tanaka and Everett Lilly continued to correspond and developed a strong friendship bond. The result was an invitation to tour Japan in 1973. That first tour was made by the Lilly Brothers, Don Stover, and myself. The tour far exceeded any expectations any of us had.

We had no real idea what to expect on this groundbreaking tour. Bluegrass bands at that time were generally not making international tours and so we were breaking new ground. By chance we ran into Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, and the Foggy Mountain Boys at the airport in Los Angeles, CA. For Dad and Lester and Earl it was like what we call "old home week" with everyone smiling. As we were parting ways Lester told my Dad "they are going to love you over there." The flights were long but exciting and we arrived after around 18 hours of travel. The next day Don Stover discovered the neck on his banjo had been broken on the flight but that was quickly and expertly repaired in Tokyo.

Our first show was at Youmira Hall in Tokyo. There was a lengthy ceremony before the show and the large concert hall was filled. I don't think any of us were ever made to feel more welcome. The atmosphere was electric even before we did the show. The show began in typical Lilly Brothers and Don Stover fashion. We quickly discovered this audience was extremely welcoming and receptive to the music. Later we were told the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover were number 1 in Japan at the time. As the show proceeded the crowd was obviously loving the music and, by the time we were in the final stages of the show, we had been on the stage for considerably longer than the average show. The encore was the longest ever for a Lilly Brothers and Don Stover show. After the show we signed autographs for about two and a half hours. I was so very happy for my father, uncle, and Don Stover knowing they truly deserved this. This tour would turn out to be the highlight of their careers.

Meeting people, having lunch with dignitaries, visiting restaurants, seeing Tokyo, and a press conference all were very exciting. Many pictures were taken with various people as well. Soon

enough we were introduced to the high speed “bullet train” that left Tokyo every fifteen minutes. Soon we were speeding through the countryside on our way to Osaka. We were told before the show to expect only “polite” applause there because the audience would be concerned about there being fewer songs in the show because of long applause. What the audience didn’t know was that the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover met each audience on it’s own terms. That is why the show in Tokyo had been exceptionally long. I never knew exactly how a Lilly Brothers and Don Stover show would go because my Dad, in particular, always read audiences correctly and responded accordingly. Thus there was never a particular order of songs and every performance was thus a unique event. The audience in Osaka was actually warm and inviting but still more reserved than the one in Tokyo. At the end the audience responded with thunderous applause and our encore was truly memorable. I can never forget the first song in the encore. It was “Open Up Them Pearly Gates.” I played but also watched my Dad and uncle Bea standing under the shimmering lights and singing that great song as well as they ever had. In that moment I thought of these two men from our little community in the southern mountains of West Virginia bringing this precious music all the way to Japan. I knew how much they, along with Don Stover, deserved this moment and I could not have been happier for them.

Back in Tokyo a second show was scheduled and we spent one memorable afternoon at a coffeehouse as well. We did a brief show at the coffeehouse and then were entertained by a talented group of young Japanese musicians. While this is commonplace now it was not back in 1973 as bluegrass was beginning to spread around the world.

A highlight of our final show in Tokyo was Dad inviting Robert Tanaka to the stage where Robert sang “Little Annie” with the group. It was truly east meets west and I’ll never forget it. Jerry Tanaka played bass on that song.

THE LOST RECORDINGS:

Before we left Tokyo we recorded a full album at a recording studio not so far from the Fairmont Hotel in Tokyo. It was a wonderful record but, for whatever reason, the album was never released. In later years Robert Tanaka and his brother, Jerry Tanaka, passed away and we have never been able to locate those recordings. I continue to believe, however, that those precious recordings have not been destroyed. If they are ever found it would be a most significant addition to Lilly Brothers and Don Stover history.

We left Tokyo with bags of gifts from various people and a profound respect for the Japanese people.

The second tour of Japan was in 1975 and we added the great fiddler, Tex Logan and my younger brother, Tennis, Lilly playing bass. This tour, including an appearance on nationwide television, was also memorable. Tennis and I, like our famous father and uncle, sang a number of brother duets on those shows.

Only my Dad would make return visits to Japan after the second tour but the memories would remain for the rest of our lives. Years later in my Dad's older age, the two of us sat down and listened to all of the songs on the three albums required to cover that first concert in Tokyo on the first tour. The albums are called Holiday in Japan Part 1, Holiday in Japan Part 2, and Holiday in Japan Part 3.

Following the first tour I recorded "Down Home Guitar" with Don Stover on the Towa label. The other musicians on the record were my brother, Tennis Lilly, and Monty Lilly who was Bea Lilly's second son. A couple of songs from that recording are included in today's program.

On our second tour of Japan in 1975 a young Kazuhiro Inaba was in the audience in Osaka. "Kaz" loved the music and went on to become a prominent Japanese bluegrass musician. One of his recordings is included on this show.

SET 1:

Song 1: Why Did You Wander

Song 2: Billy in the Lowground (Everett Alan Lilly)

Song 3: We Shall Meet

SET 2:

Song 1: Wildwood Flower (Bea Lilly) **YOUTUBE-Holiday in Japan Part 3- 12:59-16:02**

Song 2: I Wish You Knew (Kazuhiro Inaba)

Song 3: Little Rosewood Casket (Everett Lilly of the Lilly Brothers)

Set 3

Song 1: Little Annie (Robert Tanaka with the Lilly Brothers and Jerry Tanaka playing bass)

Song 2: McDowell Hollow -Everett Alan Lilly with Don Stover, Tennis Lilly, and Monty Lilly (From "Down Home Guitar" Towa Recording Company).

Song 3: Long Journey Home

Set 4

Song 1: Shady Grove (Everett Alan Lilly, Don Stover, Tennis Lilly, Monty Lilly)

Song 2: The World is Waiting for the Sunrise (Don Stover and Everett Alan Lilly)

Song 3: I Live On

Set 5

Song 1: Orange Blossom Special (**Include first encore but not the second encore. Time: 7:40**)

CLOSING SUMMARY:

I believe the groundbreaking two tours of Japan by the Lilly Brothers represented the final high point in their career. If I had to choose one word to describe the experience for all of us it would be "MAGNIFICENT." From the beginning to the end it left all of us with memories to last a lifetime. The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover played a major role in helping to open Japan to the spread of bluegrass music. Following the two groundbreaking tours it was my father who booked a number of major bluegrass acts in Japan and made the trips with them. It was the stuff that dreams are made of. Except, in this instance, the dreams were true.

Sadly, all of the musicians except me who made the two tours are gone from us now. The tours will receive major attention in my upcoming book about our musical family told against the backdrop of the Appalachian experience in our southern mountains back in West Virginia. It was a poverty area back then due, in no small measure, to the outside owners of coal companies who exploited both the beautiful mountains and the people in the quest for wealth. The end result was mass outmigration out of the region, especially by young people. All of us were part of what is now called "the great migration" which was the largest internal migration in United States history. Few migrated all the way north to Boston but we did. What unfolded there was a wonderful musical adventure for all of us. It truly was once upon a time.

If you would like to listen to all of the first concert in Tokyo in 1973 it is on three record albums on youtube:

Holiday in Japan Part 1

Holiday in Japan Part 2

Holiday in Japan Part 3

