

TITLE CARD:

Banjo Renaissance

BELA FLECK: My brother and I are watching television in Queens and I'm five to seven years old, and "The Beverly Hillbillies" comes on, and it's like [*plays the theme*] and I'm transfixed, I've never heard anything like this, and these neurons are firing in my brain. And it's like mercury notes, you know, every note is like metal, just perfect and stunning, and that's what made me wanna play the banjo.

BELA FLECK PERFORMS A SOLO BANJO PIECE.

NARRATION: *With the fading of cultural stereotypes about the banjo, innovators like Bela Fleck have been able to expand dramatically on the musical foundation provided by Earl Scruggs.*

BELA FLECK: I think of myself a lot more in terms of the world community of musicians than I think of myself in terms of the community banjo players, in terms of what I'm trying to learn and grow as a musician. I wanna know how, how I fit in, you know, what do people play jazz like? What do people play classical like? What is the level of musicianship that the great musicians have?

FOOTAGE: NEW YORK BANJO CONCERT - BILL KEITH, TONY TRISCHKA AND BELA FLECK REHEARSE. [*They're working on "Bill Cheatham" - discussing and trying out riffs, then it begins to come together*]

BELA FLECK: Sometimes I find people who are hard-core about what you should and shouldn't do and you're basing it on what somebody did in the 1940s. I can't go with that. Besides, too many people's whose music I love don't play that way. Bill Keith, when he first came in, was such a shock to the system for the bluegrass community that someone was playing that way.

IMAGES OF BILL KEITH.

NARRATION: *Bill Keith grew up in Boston in the late 1940s and first learned to play the 5-string using Pete Seeger's manual. In 1963, he became the first northern banjo player that Bill Monroe asked to join The Blue Grass Boys.*

BILL KEITH: I worked with Bill Monroe for a little less than a year. And I learned something every day. People seemed to like what I did. I mean I'd hear about 'that yankee', but it was not with 'damn' in front of it. *(laugh)*

BILL KEITH DEMONSTRATES THE MELODIC STYLE.

NARRATION: *The Eureka moment for Keith came in 1958 when he heard a fiddle player from Nova Scotia playing "Devil's Dream." He immediately grasped how he could put the fiddle's melodic line on the banjo, with matching speed and fluidity. Others were already developing a similar technique, but Keith's showcase with Monroe established the melodic style for the banjo.*

TONY TRISCHKA: So this blew down the barn doors of what you could do on a banjo. Up 'til then people are playing Scruggs style or they're playing, single-string style. No one had really thought, at least in a mass way, to play this so-called melodic or fiddle tune style.

TONY TRISCHKA AND NOAM PIKELNY AT CLUB PASSIM (2007) - "DOGGY SALT"

NARRATION: *Syracuse native Tony Trischka came of age in the 1960s and believed there were no limits to what kind of music the banjo could play. Trischka points to The Beatles, Miles Davis and Aaron Copeland as formative influences.*

TONY TRISCHKA: I think the main thing that informed my sensibility was just this attitude that was prevalent in the Sixties, "Let's break down barriers, anything can be done." You know, if I want to throw a saxophone on this tune I can do that. If I want to have a synthesizer, if I want to have crazy chords, whatever it was, "Let's take some chances." And with bluegrass, that was easy to do because, even though a lot *had* been done, there was still so much that could be done with it.

NOAM PIKELNY: I think at all times I'm aware of how lucky I am to be playing with Tony. He's such an adventurous player that being onstage with him, I kind

of find myself approaching the instrument with more of his spirit, which is just, he's just fearless.