

LOOK TOWARD THE MOUNTAIN, Episode 10 Sports and Leisure Transcript

ROB BUSCHER: Welcome to *Look Toward the Mountain: Stories from Heart Mountain Incarceration Camp*, a podcast series about life inside the Heart Mountain Japanese American Relocation Center in northwestern Wyoming during World War II. I'm your host, Rob Buscher. This podcast is presented by the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

ROB BUSCHER: The tenth episode titled "Sports and Leisure" looks at how the Heart Mountain incarcerated embraced both modern American and traditional Japanese types of entertainment and sports in camp. Although this helped Japanese Americans endure their time as prisoners and brought different people together inside the camp, it was also part of the government's plan to assimilate them into the broader American society in the postwar era.

INTRO THEME

ROB BUSCHER: Throughout this series we have explored the many ways that incarcerated kept busy during their imprisonment. While school and work provided a welcome routine, these activities also caused stress and anxiety as they would for any student worried about their grades, or workers griping about their jobs. The War Relocation Authority realized early on that they would need to provide some form of entertainment to help the incarcerated unwind after a long day of work, and give them something to look forward to on their weekends.

ROB BUSCHER: Too many unsettled people with too much time on their hands would also be difficult to control. In addition to the various methods of social control we explored in episode 8 of the series, organized sports and leisure activities were also part of the WRA plan to manage their prisoner population. Japanese Americans were encouraged to live their lives as normally as possible within the confines of the prison camps they called home. This began in the temporary assembly centers like Santa Anita where a majority of the Heart Mountain incarcerated were first imprisoned.

ROB BUSCHER: In addition to the education program at Santa Anita, incarcerated engaged in a host of other activities including theater groups, knitting classes, a choir, a band, and a string quartet. Intramural sports were also popular, at one time boasting as many as 70 softball teams. Santa Anita even had its own driving range, where inmates practiced their golf swing with clubs and balls bought through the mail order catalogues.

ROB BUSCHER: When plans for the 10 permanent camps were developed, the War Relocation Authority built designated recreation centers for each block, which housed approximately 300 incarcerated between 14 barracks. Despite the name, recreation centers were essentially empty barracks that were used to house a variety of activities in a group setting, which the residential barracks could not accommodate. The recreation halls were also a place where musicians in camp practiced their instruments, and sometimes performed for incarcerated audiences.

ROB BUSCHER: In the study of history it is sometimes difficult to reconcile the historic record with the daily experiences of the people who lived through that time period. One of the most often overlooked details is sound, which has a dramatic effect on the way people live their lives.

ROB BUSCHER: A recent survey of Japanese elders asked what they missed most about the Japan of their youth. One of the most common responses was the *karan-koron* sound of wooden geta sandals clacking on the pavement as people walked about their business in the crowded cities of pre-war Japan. Perhaps an insignificant detail in the larger scheme of history, but a fundamental aspect of the soundscape that added texture to the early Showa era's unique character during a time when Japanese society was grappling with the hybridization of Japanese traditionalism and modernity.

ROB BUSCHER: Each camp had its own unique soundscape as well, composed of the daily sounds of incarcerated, their natural surroundings, and sometimes music. Erin Aoyama is a doctoral student at Brown University and the granddaughter of Heart Mountain incarcerated. Also a talented singer and musician, she has written extensively on the musical traditions in camp and performed at past Heart Mountain pilgrimages. Aoyama offers some thoughts on the daily sounds of camp life.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: Just thinking about men singing in the showers or like singing in the bath. That there was all this sound at camp and I think it is trying to remember, like the sonic landscape of camp that we don't have any record of. But

I think, just like remembering that life was informed by all of this sound also humanizes to a certain extent, or makes it like, oh right it's not just like the whistling of that Wyoming wind or you know the sage brush or whatever, what have you. Like there's also just this music that was part of you know walking around or being in the bathroom or going to a dance or something like that.

ROB BUSCHER: In the same way that food memories play a significant role in the recollections of many incarceration survivors, music also has a unique place in their remembrance of camp life. Aoyama shares one example.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: The very first Heart Mountain pilgrimage I went to which was in 2014, I sat next to this woman Dorothy Kitaka at the banquet. She was looking for this trumpet player and she could still hear and like, sing back mostly at least the rhythm of This trumpet that used to wake her up every morning. But I remember sitting next to him being like I don't know what you're talking about, but like it was such an important memory, for her this the sound of the trumpet and she needed to like find that it had actually happened. I think you get that a lot from people who are kids in Camp like wanting to have confirmation that their memories are true, but this trumpet sound was like the most important piece to her, which I kind of forgot about in the larger musical landscape of camp, but there was also like the trumpet in the morning, that woke people up at some, in some section of camp.

ROB BUSCHER: Musicians were among the Japanese Americans who were incarcerated, so of course there was music in camp. Told to take only what they

could carry, many musicians chose to bring their prized instruments with them to Heart Mountain. But music also existed in the barracks of many incarcerated who were not musicians themselves.

ROB BUSCHER: Radios were initially forbidden by the military as contraband items for a population viewed as potential alien spies, but by the time that Japanese Americans were incarcerated at the 10 WRA camps many of these restrictions had been lifted. Using the mail order catalogues we discussed in episode 5, some incarcerated with the financial means to do so purchased radios, phonograph players, and records.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: One of the elders that I was talking with recently was talking about how her dad like built a radio. He was able to put together this radio and they could play music in their barracks and how her memories of her parents, of her parents being able to listen to like Glenn Miller and these folks that were really big and really popular and that that just brought a new flavor too. So I think thinking about music in camp, this was life and in spite of the hardships and in spite of the lack that really just informed every piece of life, there was always going to be music there.

ROB BUSCHER: In the era before broadcast television, radios were a major communications tool, allowing audiences across the country to instantaneously hear the same news bulletins and radio plays over the wireless. Of course music was the main draw for most listeners, and broadcast radio helped define the popular music tastes of each generation from the late 1920s onwards.

ROB BUSCHER: During the 1930s and 40s big band swing music reigned supreme when groups of two dozen or more musicians played elaborate compositions in lavish settings for their nightly dinner audiences. Derived from the African American Jazz scene of the 1910s and 20s in New Orleans, Memphis, and Harlem - Black musicians pioneered the integration of polyrhythms and counter-melodies with instrumentation from European orchestras. Often appropriated by white band leaders and adapted for the mainstream white American audience, this style of music was uniquely American.

ROB BUSCHER: For the Nisei who grew up in the United States, listening to popular radio band leaders like Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, and Duke Ellington - their music was a regular part of their lives, even among those who lived in rural Japanese American farming communities. For the many incarcerated who came from Los Angeles, a place that teemed with jazz bands and orchestras, the music often took a more corporeal form in a city where even the small clubs and restaurants would employ dozens of musicians to entertain their patrons most nights of the week.

ROB BUSCHER: Some of the Heart Mountain incarcerated who came from Los Angeles had connections with that city's entertainment industry. Like the visual artists we explored in the previous episode who worked in LA's bustling art world, Japanese American musicians also found steady work as musicians in their local music scene before the war. Hollywood studios employed musicians who

performed scores for recorded film soundtracks, while others worked the nightly supper clubs and dance hall circuit.

ROB BUSCHER: When they were sent to Heart Mountain, many musicians brought their instruments among the limited possessions they could carry. Erin Aoyama shares her thoughts on the musicians who continued their craft in camp.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: Learning about music and camp for me as a historian was a really interesting way to think about life in camp from a context and like from a standpoint I hadn't considered before. As someone who is a musician and like, music is such a part of my life - I had never thought about music in camp. Which is such a silly thing when you think about like, anywhere a musician goes they're a musician like, no matter what they're doing. And so I think the thought of people being told you know take only what you can carry and you have someone bringing a guitar case or you know, maybe more historically accurate like a violin case or a trumpet. Instead of another suitcase or something - like just not being able to imagine going somewhere without your instrument. I think, was such an important way in for me to think about what camp was, and how life kept going. And that music was both like a saving grace in so many ways, I think that it made, it brought communities together, it was a way to sort of stay a part of who you were before camp. But then it was also just such a normal thing like, of course, there was going to be music in camp in all these different contexts.

ROB BUSCHER: Soon after arriving in camp musicians began forming bands, and before long they built a vibrant music scene at Heart Mountain. The most popular among the band leaders there was Nisei George Igawa. Born 1908 in Los Angeles, George Igawa was a talented Tenor saxophonist and bandleader. Throughout the 1930s, Igawa led the Japanese American swing band called the Sho-Tokyans. His band played in clubs around Los Angeles and even toured Japan.

ROB BUSCHER: After Pearl Harbor, Igawa and his family were sent first to the Pomona assembly center and then to Heart Mountain. It didn't take him long to find members for a new band in camp, which he named, the George Igawa Orchestra. The most professional musical outfit at Heart Mountain, Igawa's orchestra practiced daily and performed nearly every weekend at camp events such as dances, weddings, and holiday celebrations.

ROB BUSCHER: At its peak, the orchestra boasted six saxophones, five trumpets, three trombones, a piano, a guitar, a string bass, and drums. They were accompanied by both male and female vocalists.

ROB BUSCHER: For Heart Mountain adolescents and young adults, dances were some of the only places where they were completely free from the watchful eyes of their Issei parents. They became a core aspect of youth culture during the camp years, and a welcome distraction from the many troubles they were confronted with, if only for a brief moment.

ROB BUSCHER: Nisei Kara Kondo edited the social world section for the Sentinel newspaper. In one article during the early months at Heart Mountain Kondo wrote,

KARA KONDO VOICE OVER: A tall youth danced by with a pretty girl. "Say this is some party, pretty nice. I almost forget where I am." The smiling face of his partner became thoughtful. A look of sadness crept into her eyes. "I can't forget. I never do."

ROB BUSCHER: Although the George Igawa Orchestra and other musicians at Heart Mountain did often perform live, many of the dances were held using recorded music, and sometimes the Sentinel even published the track listings in advance. Erin Aoyama elaborates.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: You do have high school kids going to dances away from their parents that are just really separate. Obviously chaperoned and you, you know, had to sign up and like be on good - in good standing to go. Like there's some great Sentinel articles about like, this boys club like misbehaved and will not be invited back to this next one, because they were all sponsored by different clubs in different groups that happened.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: Thinking about like communities of high schoolers from different areas - you have like kids from LA who are pretty cool and like know the coolest dance moves and have been around like African Americans MLA and Mexican Americans and sort of absorbed all these different kind of styles of

dancing and dressing, and then you have kids from like farms that haven't had that experience of being in a city and are also thrown into this experience. And so, this like meshing of all these different kind of regional cultures as well, that I think is important to think about in any camp context.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: Obviously, we know Japanese America was not a monolith at this point, but that within camp it's not like everybody got along or everyone had the same favorite song or favorite dance move there's all this stuff that's happening also and being worked out whether or not it's like consciously seen or understood, but you have like this tension of who's cool and who's not the same way you do at high school anytime for any of us, but on the dance floor or in how you're dressing for a dance or who's going with who and that kind of stuff. You have also all mixed together in these mess halls covered with cream of wheat on the floor, so people can like jitterbug and do all that kind of stuff as well.

ROB BUSCHER: By 1943 many Wyoming musicians had left home for military service, so there was a demand for the George Igawa Orchestra by local audiences outside of camp as well. Word spread about the talented "Jap" musicians located between Cody and Powell, and soon Igawa was booking gigs throughout the state. A few of their notable shows include the high school prom in Thermopolis, a Mormon church dance in Lovell, and a Red Cross benefit in Powell.

ROB BUSCHER: Nisei Sam Mihara was incarcerated with his family at age 9. He recalls how the Heart Mountain musicians would sometimes perform outside of camp for Wyoming locals.

SAM MIHARA INTERVIEW: I think there were two bands. They were very popular, in fact they went outside the camp. Part of the campaign to try to raise war bond funds for the government.

ROB BUSCHER: For Jimmie Akiya, who played drums in the George Igawa Orchestra it meant a chance to see the outside world.

JIMMIE AKIYA VOICE OVER: The first time I left camp was a member of the orchestra. A war bond rally in Powell was the first outside stint we had. It was amazing how they reacted.

ROB BUSCHER: The comings and goings of many incarceratedees who found jobs outside of Heart Mountain meant the band's lineup constantly changed. As more professional musicians found work outside of camp playing with bands in Midwest or East coast cities, this made it necessary to bring new talent to the George Igawa Orchestra ranks that included amateur musicians and even a lucky few high school students.

ROB BUSCHER: One prominent example was Joy Takeshita Teraoka, who was 15 when she and her family were incarcerated at Heart Mountain. As a high school student in Los Angeles, she loved to sing but had never even performed with a band, let alone dreamt of being a frontwoman.

ROB BUSCHER: After some of the first musicians left camp for work elsewhere, Joy went to the tryouts for the George Igawa Orchestra with her girls club, the Radelles. She became one of its featured vocalists and toured around Wyoming with the orchestra during the year Joy spent at Heart Mountain. Erin Aoyama interviewed Teraoka at length about these experiences while curating a special exhibit about music in camp that showed at the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center in 2019.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: I like to think a lot about Joy Takeshita Teraoka who was one of the singers with the George Igawa band who talks about you know auditioning for the band, and it was this thing she kind of always wanted to do, but if she'd stayed at home in LA she probably never would have been singing in front of a big band as a teenager because just that wouldn't have been part of her life but being in Camp made it possible that she could do this fun thing that she'd always kind of dreamed about. And I think you hear those stories from other musicians too, you know, people who also ordered-in instruments eventually and joined this band. It was really good for a while and then, once more folks left and resettled elsewhere, you know they were pulling in high school kids who were not as good.

ROB BUSCHER: Joy left Heart Mountain when her family relocated on September 1st, 1943, but the Igawa orchestra found another young singer to take her place. Takeko "Tubbie" Kunimatsu grew up in Bellingham, Washington, north of Seattle where her uncle ran a restaurant in town. After Pearl Harbor, Tubbie and her cousins were sent to the camp at Tule Lake, California. They were among the

hundreds sent from Tule Lake to Heart Mountain in 1943 during the segregation of so-called “loyal” and “disloyal” incarcerated. Tubbie was 18 when she arrived at Heart Mountain where she soon joined the orchestra. However, a few months later in January 1944, Tubbie was on her way to Chicago for a job.

ROB BUSCHER: George Igawa wasn't far behind her. He would leave in June for a job in Chicago, too. Despite losing its bandleader and most of the professional musicians to work outside camp, the George Igawa Orchestra continued performing with new amateur musicians until the camp finally closed in 1945.

ROB BUSCHER: George Igawa wasn't the only band leader at Heart Mountain, and swing wasn't the only genre of music to be found. Nisei Alfred Tanaka was born in Hawaii but lived in Los Angeles when the incarceration began. Tanaka played a very different style of music than Igawa's swing outfit. At Heart Mountain he started a band called the Surf Riders, which played a contemporary blend of Hawaiian music.

ROB BUSCHER: Aside from their unique musical stylings, the Surf Riders stood out in Wyoming as they played all of their gigs wearing flower leis and Hawaiian shirts, regardless of the weather. Amy Tanaka sang with the band and trained young women in the art of hula dancing to accompany their performances. The Surf Riders found success with the Japanese American audiences, many of whom had Hawaiian roots, and performed weekly at the mess hall talent shows.

ROB BUSCHER: Along with his own band, Tanaka played upright bass in the George Igawa Orchestra. This led the two bands to share most of their concert bills, especially when the Orchestra got gigs outside of camp where the Surf Riders performed as an opening act and between sets. Like Igawa's Orchestra, the Surf Riders were favorably received by most audiences, but their off-premise excursions were not without incident.

ROB BUSCHER: During one of their performances outside of camp, a bartender refused to serve Tanaka and one of the other Japanese Hawaiians, whose dark complexion was similar to the Native Americans. They eventually got their drinks after explaining they were Hawaiian, not "injuns" as the bartender had claimed.

ROB BUSCHER: This incident may have inspired Tanaka and his cohorts to take a more intentional role as goodwill ambassadors of the Japanese American community in their future interactions with Wyoming residents. Erin Aoyama elaborates on the unique role these incarcerated musicians served.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: I don't know how much the members of the band, I mean as individuals who knows, but if they had meetings before or rehearsals before and whether being goodwill ambassadors was part of that conversation - I like to imagine it was kind of like, "hey let's go play this music and like show them that we can do this kind of music." Because you also have to think about I mean it's still weird for me, as a Japanese American musician, to think about listening to a band of entirely Japanese American musicians playing big songs from the 40s you know. So I think also just being like whoa that is a huge statement in and of

itself and then to be at a prom and like whether the kids at the prom had an awareness of this prison camp that these people were coming from.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: This idea that you could have something as normal as a prom happening, however many miles from a prison camp where an entire community of people are incarcerated because of their background and their race, and then to bring those two together at that prom is just wild to me. But I would imagine you know, like many other parts of the Japanese American incarceration story, this was sort of a like... You know we're going to make the best of this like we are a band, we have this opportunity to play we're going to play. I think that's very much a musician mindset as well.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: I'm sure, for some of them, it was like yeah we're proving that we can do this. I would imagine some of them were scared, I would be kind of scared going into a situation like that, on top of the normal nerves, like the stakes, of being bad maybe felt much higher at any of these kinds of places that they were playing that were outside of camp.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: And I think it highlights the hypocrisy of the whole process of incarceration too, that like you know, as so many other pieces of the story touch on. It's like, well we put you in prison camps, because we can't trust that you're not actually spying for Japan. But we're going to let some of join the army, in fact we're going to draft some of you. And we're going to let you play in a band, and we're also going to let you leave and play at these proms or these

fundraisers or what have you, that just sort of highlight the whole craziness that was happening.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: But then I think like the individual camp process that Heart Mountain had a director that let this happen, and was okay with this happening. Other camps didn't have those kinds of opportunities or the state governors didn't want Japanese Americans out at all and on display at all so. It does just sort of raise all these really fascinating historical quandaries in a way that, then I also think it's fun to be like, "if I were a musician in this band, how would I be thinking about this?" And knowing, like most of the musicians I know would just be like, "heck yeah it's a show we're going to do it." With all this other stuff in the background, too.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: There's always that kind of awkwardness, nervousness of setting the tone and people are kind of waiting to see are you good, are you bad what's going to happen and I'd like to imagine, by the time they left there was more of a sense of like, "oh wow you're really good like i'm surprised, this was great." And for the musicians to be like they'd accomplish something, but accomplish something to go back then to the prison camp so...

ROB BUSCHER: In the spring of 1943, Tanaka heard that KPOW radio in Powell was having a contest for local musicians who would compete for a slot on their weekly music program. The Surf Riders tried out, were accepted, and received permission to leave camp each Thursday to perform live on the radio. Erin Aoyama elaborates.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: But yea, they had this weekly show. I think for me, that story is such an interesting way of thinking about the relationship between Heart Mountain the camp and the communities around it. I know Powell, I think there mayor something had one of his sons, was killed in the Pacific, or some kind of story like that, and so they were pretty anti-Japanese in Powell but then you have this group playing on the radio and like eventually you know you'd have some Japanese Americans go into Powell to go shopping and things like that you hear those kinds of stories. So I think that at the most cliché level it's this way of like, music is universal and music is something that people can enjoy no matter what. Which I think is true, and then I think it's also this thing that on the radio you're not looking at someone's face at this point you're not seeing what they look like.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: Obviously The Surf Rider's played a pretty specific kind of music, and so you know, maybe that it did evoke certain images. But it's also like this kind of Hawaiian vibe which, in the 40s and then into the 50s is a very sort of sought after idea of like, "oh, we want to like celebrate this island sound." For all the problematic things that are tied-in there, I think, thinking about the fact that The Surf Riders music was appealing and could have a weekly radio spot is pretty interesting in historical context at this point in time also.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: But yeah I think the radio was such a powerful tool of communication in the 40s, especially during wartime. Thinking about a little station in Powell Wyoming making space every week for this band to play is pretty amazing, and I wonder what it was like for those musicians to go you know, to do

that every week and what they thought of or if they thought about whatever they were communicating to the community of like, “hey we're like making a name for ourselves as a band,” or like, “we're introducing people to folks who are incarcerated at Heart Mountain,” and whatever. Or if they were just like, “we're musicians and we want to play, and we want to get our music out there, and this is our shot.” I have a feeling was all those things mixed up together.

ROB BUSCHER: Despite the weekly radio programs, no known recordings exist of the Surf Riders, nor any other Heart Mountain bands. The tropical stylings of the Surf Riders ended with their time at Heart Mountain when the Tanaka family relocated to Chicago in March 1944.

ROB BUSCHER: Another prominent group at Heart Mountain was the Mandolin Band, which in addition to their namesake mandolins players, also included accordion, guitar, and violin.

ROB BUSCHER: One of its members was Estelle Ishigo, the white artist who voluntarily joined her Japanese American husband Arthur in camp. Ishigo had played violin since she was 12 years old, and performed many of the lead melodies in the Mandolin Band.

ROB BUSCHER: Unlike George Igawa and Alfred Tanaka’s Nisei bandmates, most of the Mandolin Band players were Issei immigrants who incorporated their love of traditional Japanese music into the group’s repertoire. Although the Mandolin Band’s instrumentation conjures an image of traditional Americana and Country Western music, the combination of Western instruments and Japanese melodies

was not uncommon in the Taisho and early Showa eras in Japan. One might imagine the sounds blending together in the unique sonic tapestry of pre-war Japanese cities, along with the *karan-koron* of the wooden geta.

ROB BUSCHER: Erin Aoyama offers additional insight as to how the Mandolin Band differed from the other bands at Heart Mountain.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: I think there's two points that come to mind immediately thinking about the mandolin band. One being just the level of musicianship that existed at Camp, that there were folks who could translate songs for different instrumentation. Which I think you see happen with the George Igawa Orchestra here as well. But whether it was you know written out for different instruments or whether it's kind of like, "all right here's the chord, here's the pattern, here's the melody, let's play it together and see what happens." And probably some mix of both of those things depending on the performance. But I think there were folks who were really, really excellent musicians, who were going to make music work for different forms and different content and wanting to have...

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: The other point I think about a lot is, "how much of Camp sounded Japanese?" By which I mean like how much spoken Japanese is actually present in camp and then how much traditional music and traditional dancing? That was a really important part that, at least for me, sometimes it's easy to gloss over because I don't read or speak Japanese or you know i'm not

super familiar with traditional Japanese music. And I think that tends to be the case, among Yonsei and younger Japanese American scholars.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: Because my grandparents who grew up speaking Japanese never spoke Japanese to my dad or his brother I didn't speak Japanese at all growing up. There's this break that happens after camp because of that lasting trauma and this experience of being incarcerated because of your ties to Japan, your familial ties. It's easy to forget that camp itself was very much informed by Japanese language, and Japanese traditions, and Japanese music.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: And so I think that creates such a different like sonic memory there that I think is really important to hold on to. The newspapers had Japanese sections and all the signs were in English and Japanese. This is like things we know from photographs, but you don't hear it from a photograph right or you don't hear it from reading the newspaper.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: So I think the memory of the mandolin band, and the sound that honestly I can't really hear in my head, I agree, like I think of the bluegrass, which I know is not exactly what it is. But I think, remembering that sound was there and seeing one of Estelle Ishigo's watercolors is I think it's maybe the only one that she is in, and you can see her from behind and it's the mandolin band and she's tuning her violin to go play. I think it's just this beautiful - to me, I look at that watercolor and there's a sonic element to it as well because it's like it was important for her to capture that important for her to put herself in that image which was unique for her watercolors.

ERIN AOYAMA INTERVIEW: And to remember that, like the sound of the big band was matched by also these you know traditional Japanese sounds as well, both melody and instrumentation wise and that these camps were such Japanese American spaces in the purest sense of what Japanese American can mean. So to me, I think the mandolin band is an important sonic reminder of that piece as well.

ROB BUSCHER: Central to the band's performances were members of the Heart Mountain's Japanese dance classes that were led by young Michiko Iseri of Los Angeles, who would later go on to become a leading choreographer in New York's dance scene, and is best remembered for her consultant role on the Broadway production of *The King and I*. At Heart Mountain Iseri was chosen by the leaders of her block council to teach dance classes to children and young adults.

MICHIKO ISERI VOICE OVER: You know, we need some entertainment, otherwise, people start fighting.

ROB BUSCHER: Iseri created costumes from scrap fabrics that the prisoners brought to camp with them. Her mother and her former kabuki dance teacher made wigs. Some women who brought their kimonos with them to camp, lent them for the performances.

ROB BUSCHER: Incarceration survivor Sam Mihara remembers how the Mandolin Band often accompanied Japanese traditional dance and theater performances that were sometimes held in the mess halls after dinner.

SAM MIHARA INTERVIEW: There were two forms of music. One is the Japanese style music, which usually accompanied the theater. All the ones I recall were held in the mess halls after dinner. And they would convert part of the mess hall into a theater and everybody sat down at the benches and they would rotate from block to block and provide entertainment after we finished supper. It was a very rough representation of a theater, but at least it had the similarities of a genuine Japanese theater. I think the demand was to have everything in Japanese as I recall, I don't remember translation or English versions.

ROB BUSCHER: Mihara also remembers how the mess halls and recreation halls were converted to accommodate the weekly film programs.

SAM MIHARA INTERVIEW: Young people sat on the floor or they would have benches. Nothing fancy, like a theater seating arrangement at all. And no electronic video systems, it's still films so I remember seeing these large reels of films come in and they would show that. As I recall now there were two theaters, dedicated full time theaters at two different parts of the camp. I remember seeing movies, especially the cowboy movies: Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. And similar types of movies that were showing. A lot of more serials, where you've seen one, you gotta go to see the next one. But it was enjoyable watching cartoons and Western movies.

ROB BUSCHER: Given the popularity of the motion picture programs Heart

Mountain camp administrators designated two recreational barracks as dedicated movie theaters. Another childhood incarceree, Bill Shishima remembers,

BILL SHISHIMA RECORDING FROM DENSHO: We had two theater houses, one was called the Pagoda, the other was called Dawn Theater. And it cost us, I think, ten cents. And I wasn't too much for movies, but we saw Buck Roger movies. Probably some cowboys, yeah, cowboy pictures. But then, like I say, I wasn't too interested in movies, plus the fact that to go to the movies, oftentimes you have to give up dinner or make arrangements to get food before or after because the line for the theater starts at the time we're served dinner. So unless you go get in line, you can't get in there after dinner, it's too late. So you had to sacrifice or make arrangements, someone get in line for you, and then you get food for them. You had to plan ahead to do that. But there's one, I remember the title was *Going My Way*, a Bing Crosby movie.

ROB BUSCHER: The price for attending a movie was a nickel for children and a dime for adults. In the three and a half years that Heart Mountain was operated, these makeshift movie houses took in more than \$48,000 - or a whopping \$770,000 in today's money. Given their circumstances it's little wonder that the incarcerees took solace in the escapist fantasies of Hollywood cinema.

ROB BUSCHER: Aside from music, theater, and film screenings - by far the most popular form of entertainment at Heart Mountain were the dozens of sports games played on a weekly basis throughout the spring, summer, and fall seasons. Sports not only provided a physical outlet for incarcerees to work out some of

their frustrations, but was also seen by camp authorities as a positive step towards Americanization. The Nisei almost universally preferred American sports to Japanese martial arts like Judo and Kendo that were practiced by some of the Issei at Heart Mountain.

ROB BUSCHER: Issei were also among the many spectators who enjoyed intramural team matches, since long before World War II, American sports and particularly baseball had been adopted by Japanese society. Baseball was first introduced to Japan in 1872, and quickly became the nation's most popular spectator sport. The eight teams who made up the Japanese Professional Baseball League even continued playing throughout much of World War II, until August 1944 when too many of their star athletes were conscripted into service with the Imperial Army.

ROB BUSCHER: In the United States, Issei and Nisei alike embraced baseball as a means to gain acceptance. It was common for Japanese Americans to be seen on the field as members of the mostly white high school teams. However, the popularity of the sport also necessitated additional intramural Nisei sports leagues for both baseball and basketball in the more heavily populated Japanese American communities of the West coast.

ROB BUSCHER: In the assembly centers at Santa Anita and Pomona, the military built baseball and softball diamonds, where players from many different Nisei sports clubs regularly competed against each other.

ROB BUSCHER: Dr. Yoosun Park, who holds a PhD in social work comments on the additional benefits that government officials saw in team sports for their Japanese American prisoners.

YOOSUN PARK INTERVIEW: Also beyond the social welfare departments, the Recreation Department were often run by social workers. So at the time, there was this arm of Social Work called group work, which was really prominent. So the WRA made a decision to try and hire group work people to run Community Activities departments and to bring in group work philosophy, which had to do with simply doing group activity. But for the ultimate purpose of building a better democracy. So how do you build a better citizen right?

YOOSUN PARK INTERVIEW: And so what those activities did was really promote American activities which they thought would prepare people to go out and resettle somewhere, and it would allay their fears. Things like social dancing, baseball, all that sort of stuff right was really pushed. And then funding for Japanese activities were cut. People were really dissuaded from having Go clubs or judo or you know calligraphy, or any of that stuff. Social workers were absolutely complicit in this idea that to be Japanese is not to be American. And never the twain shall meet, kind of idea.

ROB BUSCHER: Although the social welfare department oversaw community activities, outside groups like the Young Woman's Christian Association were also involved at Heart Mountain and the other WRA camps. The YWCA sponsored high school dances and many other recreational activities with the express purpose of

preparing incarcerated individuals to assimilate into the broader American society after the war. Dr. Park comments on the underlying racism that was inherent in these activities.

YOOSUN PARK INTERVIEW: Probably the best people in social work were the YWCA, which was a group work organization. They had branches in all of the camps and they were constant visitors. They came all the time and were very, very, very involved in the community activities stuff. They're also very much of the mind, that especially the Nisei - they're American and now we just have to make sure that they become integrated.

YOOSUN PARK INTERVIEW: They're the only social work organization which from the beginning said, "no this is racist, we should not do this." But even they had this underlying notion that acculturation was going to be unidirectional right? So the Japanese Americans needed to become absorbed into White America. And white middle class America, actually, because there's so much classism involved in their work as well. I don't think any of the social workers, not just in the camps but I mean in general as a profession, really bucked against that.

ROB BUSCHER: Like many of the sad ironies related to the wartime incarceration, the Nisei were already fully immersed in American culture as much as any other 1940s adolescents. Most of the Nisei had grown up watching and playing sports with their white American friends. There was no need to educate Nisei incarcerated individuals about a culture that they already belonged to, and in most cases related to far more than their immigrant parents' Japanese culture.

ROB BUSCHER: Nevertheless, the WRA invested heavily in infrastructure related to athletics at Heart Mountain and the other camps, and incarcerateds enthusiastically responded.

ROB BUSCHER: Heart Mountain boasted dozens of intramural baseball teams whose weekly games filled up large sections of the Sentinel's sports section. Headed up by Sports Editor Jack Kunitomi, the Sentinel Sports section was one of its most popular features. Darrell Kunitomi, who serves on the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation's Board, offers some remembrances about his father Jack's career in journalism and love of sports.

DARRELL KUNITOMI INTERVIEW: Well our father Jack Kunitomi, super quiet Nisei man and we didn't know a whole lot about his prior life to our great baby boom family in the 50s and 60s. He was the Sports Editor of the Heart Mountain Sentinel, we kind of knew that, but we never saw his articles. Eventually he gave me his complete collection of the Heart Mountain Sentinel but I've not read through them all. I've glanced at some of his columns. He was apparently a very good writer and a great athlete so he knew the inside story on athletics. He was a great baseball player, he liked football too, but really loved baseball and was a highly skilled guy. Shortstop. He was proud that he hit for the Saigo and had a lot of fun with his Oliver pals back in the day.

DARRELL KUNITOMI INTERVIEW: He was drafted in 1944 so I'm not exactly sure how long his Sentinel career was. That was what they called the best of the camp

newspapers, so he was a member of a pretty high-class staff of young journalists. Led obviously by the famous Bill Hosokawa.

ROB BUSCHER: Heart Mountain's community of 10,000 put on enough athletic events to warrant a full page spread in each edition of the paper. While the Nisei love of sport was equal to if not greater than their white American counterparts, many Japanese American athletes were handicapped by their smaller average size compared to their white teammates and opponents. In baseball this was less of an issue, but for football and basketball where size and height were important factors this limited their ability to compete. Still, some among the Nisei generation embraced football as their sport.

ROB BUSCHER: Before he was incarcerated at Heart Mountain, George Yoshinaga played on his high school football team in Mountain View, California. Another Nisei incarceree, Babe Nomura, played for Hollywood High - one of the most famous schools in the country, attended by teen movie stars like Lana Turner, Mickey Rooney, and Judy Garland. Nomura had hopes for a professional career in sports, and was widely acknowledged as one of the camp's best athletes.

ROB BUSCHER: Shortly after Heart Mountain high school opened in the Fall of 1942, basketball and baseball teams were formed under their namesake mascot The Eagles. Although their baseball team had plenty of competition from the other Nisei intramural teams in camp, the Heart Mountain basketball team would need to look elsewhere for opponents.

ROB BUSCHER: They would get their chance when nearby Lovell High School offered to host a friendly match in February 1943. Located 35 miles East of camp, many of the adult incarcerated and older high school students had already traveled there to work the sugar beet harvest the previous Fall, generating more goodwill in the community than their neighboring towns of Cody and Powell.

ROB BUSCHER: Bradford Pearson is author of *The Eagles of Heart Mountain*, a book that offers new insight into the daily lives of incarcerated and the role that sports played in the Japanese American community before, during, and after the war. Pearson elaborates on the first basketball match played by an untried incarcerated squad.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: They started playing baseball and basketball in that winter and fall of 42 and when they started scheduling interscholastic games with teams outside the camp, I started reading up on those teams. The first game they ever played was against this team from Lovell, which was a Mormon community. The Eagles didn't know this going in, but that team was basically the best Latter Day Saints basketball team in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. There's an annual Mormon basketball tournament, they play in Salt Lake City. And that team from Lovell that the Heart Mountain High School just happened to play the first game was the best Mormon basketball team in North America. They just got cleaned out and that wasn't necessarily because they were smaller than these players that was just because these kids shot the lights out. I do think that the size of the Eagle's basketball teams did weigh them down. There's less ways to make up for that on the basketball court than there are on the football field, I guess.

ROB BUSCHER: Despite their best efforts, the height differential was a difficult barrier for the Japanese American team to overcome, whose tallest player Babe Nomura was a mere 5 foot 10. Babe's teammates averaged about 5 foot 6. The Heart Mountain basketball team would go on to lose all of their subsequent matches that season.

ROB BUSCHER: Thankfully during the Fall season of 1943, high school football would provide the Heart Mountain athletes with a much needed ego boost. Bradford Pearson explains how the unlikely winners got their start.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: From the moment that they announced that they were going to have a football season to the first game was 13 days. And those 13 days I looked everywhere to kind of figure out what they did to crack people into shape. I was able to interview one living Eagle Keichi Ikeda and he was like, "we practiced." The whole interview was great, but of course, you don't really remember what your practice was from like 75 years ago.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: They leaned really heavily on the players that had played and the fact that, you know, their best player was Babe Nomura, who was a starting running back at Hollywood high school. So they had a real advantage in that their star player was on, you know, one of the biggest high school is probably one of the most famous high schools in America.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: Maybe not the best football high school, but he played great competition Los Angeles. He was a great athlete. He was a great all around athlete. And I think that's what made The Eagles successful even when

they didn't necessarily understand football was that they had gathered this group of kids who were just great athletes and they said, "okay, here's the rules of this game. Figure it out and then just use your own athleticism, whether you are good at basketball or whether you're a good second baseman or whatever it is, whatever your sport was before camp." You know, there were 40 kids that tried out that came to try out and only three of them and ever played football before.

ROB BUSCHER: The high school athletes at Heart Mountain faced different challenges than most of the teams they competed against. Not all of the students took classes on a regular schedule. Many just needed one or two classes to complete their high school educations that were derailed by the forced removal. Others left camp to work on nearby farms or work projects. Coaches on the high school faculty also came and went as wartime demands drew them to different jobs outside of Heart Mountain. In other words, the Eagles football team bore little resemblance to athletics programs in the outside world.

ROB BUSCHER: One of their immediate challenges was finding other teams to compete against. They would have to find a coach who knew the local communities well enough to organize games. Luckily they found their man at Cody High School, just 14 miles down the road from Heart Mountain. Ray Thompson and his brother Wedge were multi-sport athletes at Thermopolis High School in the 1920s. Thompson went on to the University of Wyoming, where he continued his exploits on the Cowboys' football team. After college, he became a coach at several schools around Wyoming. Before the war Thompson was coaching at Cody

High for a few seasons, but he left in early 1943 to become an agriculture and physical education teacher at Heart Mountain. But even with Thompson's local connections, the Eagles were only able to schedule four games during their first season.

ROB BUSCHER: Their first opponent was Worland High School. Located about 100 miles southwest of the camp, Worland was one of the few Wyoming towns that had a Japanese American community before the war. One of the notable Worland Japanese Americans was Nisei Grant Ujifusa, who would later go on to help the community win a formal apology and monetary recompense from the United States government through his role as Japanese American Citizens League's Redress Strategy Chair.

ROB BUSCHER: Among the football teams in the Big Horn Basin, Worland was a known quantity. Seven out of the eleven players in the squad that Heart Mountain faced were returning from their 1942 season and were far more experienced at playing together as a team.

ROB BUSCHER: By contrast, the Eagles had less than two weeks of training before their first match, and only three of their players who had even played high school football before. In addition to quarterback Babe Nomura, this included George "Horse" Yoshinaga who played on both the offensive and defensive lines, and Lomo Shinji. Before the war, Shinji had been the only Japanese American on the Phineas Banning High School varsity team and weighed in at 175 pounds. Shinji was practically a giant compared to most of his other Heart Mountain teammates.

ROB BUSCHER: Assisting Ray Thompson in molding this ragtag group into a team was Nisei Toyoshi “Tubby” Kawasaki. At five feet, six inches tall and weighing 190 pounds, Tubby was built like a linebacker. In the 1930s, he had been a prominent athlete in Los Angeles. When he filled out the so-called loyalty questionnaire in 1943, Tubby listed his passions as poster making and coaching football.

ROB BUSCHER: Thompson and Kawasaki had only 13 days to build the Eagles into something resembling a football team. They had a single advantage - the Eagles would be playing on their home turf. It was too difficult to get transportation and permission for the incarcerated players to leave camp for a game in Worland. That meant Worland would play on a field surrounded by Japanese American faces.

ROB BUSCHER: Bradford Pearson elaborates on what it might have meant for the white players who journeyed into camp to play against the Eagles.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: For most of these kids that are coming from more tender level or wherever they're coming from. The idea of them going into a situation where they're on a bus and they're going through barbed wire armed guards and they show up on a football field that has 5000 Japanese Americans lining the field. That must have been something uniquely profound for them as well. You know, maybe they didn't learn anything from it or maybe they were racist or weren't racist, I don't know. But you have to remember that. Like there's not like a situation where you spend your whole life being like, Oh no, I don't remember that time I went into a concentration camp and played a football game.

ROB BUSCHER: Thompson and Kawasaki kept their playbook simple for their inexperienced players. The *Heart Mountain Sentinel* described the game this way:

SENTINEL VOICE OVER: In the first period of the game, the Orange and Blacks drove deep into Eagle territory on several occasions but the gallant Eagle eleven repelled the attack. The second and third quarters witnessed a seesaw battle with neither team threatening to score. Midway in the final period, the Eagle offense came to life and after a sustained drive of 93 yards, quarterback Babe Nomura tossed a short pass to fullback Mas Yoshiyama for the game's lone touchdown. Nomura converted the extra point to give the local preps a well-earned 7-0 game.

ROB BUSCHER: The Eagles were jubilant, as were the several thousand incarcerated who had lined the field to watch the game. Incarceration survivor Frank Sumida remembered what he called the Eagles secret weapon.

FRANK SUMIDA RECORDING FROM DENSHO: They went to play the Worland High School, and there were a couple of Japanese on there. They were railroad workers' son, like my dad, their son. And they were on the football team, they couldn't speak Japanese. They couldn't understand Japanese. So the camp guys, all the *Nisei* that, on the football team in camp, a lot of them could speak Japanese in some way or another, saying, "You *bakatare*," you know what I mean. So *migi*, *hidari*, *manaka*, simple things they knew. So verbally, they were making the play as they ran it, no huddle. And then on the other side, the white people and the Japanese didn't know what the hell this guy's saying. So they just ran crazy over there.

ROB BUSCHER: As Sumida notes, one of the incredible ironies of this story is the fact that Worland had a Nisei player on their team. Bradford Pearson also offers his commentary.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: There was one player - the first game that Eagles ever played was against Worland and on that team there was a Nisei player whose family had left Washington before removal and sort of said like, "Okay, we got to get out of here." They had a friend that already moved out to Worland and so they moved out to Worland and he basically went in, played the football game, and then went home.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: It really just showed how capricious and unnecessary the removal was right, where you had this guy - the 17 year old whose family just happened to have the financial means to be able to leave the coast before forced removal. And then he ends up by sheer happenstance to go to this one high school near Heart Mountain and then play against this football team made of all other Nisei players. But then he gets to go home. You know, like he gets he gets driven into this concentration camp and then gets to go back to his house in Worland where I'm sure that he faced, you know, the racism of the times, but he still got to eat dinner with his family in a home and not be in a barrack. And I think that, finding that story was just so mind blowing to me because it really just showed how unnecessary all of this was.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: Like, we know this as people who have studied this or if your families lived this but it's like for the average reader to pick up this book and like see that instance and be like, oh, there's no reason for any of this to

happen. If that specific story can happen, like there's no reason for any of this to have happened.

ROB BUSCHER: The Eagles would go on to win all three of their matches against local teams during the 1943 season, never conceding a single touchdown to the opposition. In 1944 a slightly more robust season of 4 games plus one scrimmage, the Eagles lost only once. Pearson explains how the local Wyoming residents reacted to the surprisingly talented Japanese American football team.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: Obviously there was a lot of Sentinel stories, but then occasionally I'd be able to find stories from The Cody enterprise or the papers in Casper or some of the papers right over the border in Montana that had quotes from some of the other coaches from these other white high schools and they were basically just kind of stunned. Every time that they would talk about them. They would just say like, "they're good, they're good." But then they would always have like some quote that would say, "I wish they would let up on my boys, my boys are only 190 pounds, you know, take it easy on them." And it's like, you can tell that it was kind of tongue in cheek, where they're like all right, these guys have figured out a completely different way to play football that we've never seen before.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: And I think a lot of that just has to do with the fact that the Eagles football team was better. Especially in that second season you started seeing teams pull their games off the season off the schedule.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: You started seeing players and teams refuse to play the Eagles. A nearby community of Powell, they're also undefeated and the Eagles are undefeated. Literally, the team votes to not play the Eagles and pulls the game off the schedule and the coach has to call the Eagles coach and say, "sorry, my players voted against this." I think that there's probably a level of pride there in the white teams that you know, it was all fun and games on the basketball court where, you know, we get an easy win and we beat this team of Japanese American kids 52 to 20 or whatever.

BRADFORD PEARSON INTERVIEW: But once they got to the football field, a much more physical game that they thought they should be able to dominate. They were just getting their clocks cleaned by three touchdowns six touchdowns eight touchdowns, you know, sometimes teams are losing the Eagles 16 and nothing on the football field. You'd have to look at that and think, Okay, well, these guys just didn't want to lose to a bunch of Japanese American teenagers, they would have been embarrassed I think.

ROB BUSCHER: Although they were not given the recognition they deserved, the Eagles finished out their nearly undefeated two season record as one of the best highschool teams in Wyoming football history.

ROB BUSCHER: Music and Sports made life inside Heart Mountain more bearable - providing incarceratedees with brief moments of joy amidst the overwhelming hopelessness of their situation. Encouraging incarceratedees to engage in these facets of popular culture were just a few of many strategies that the WRA employed in their attempts to "Americanize" and assimilate the Japanese American

community.

ROB BUSCHER: If the white Americans in the US military and federal government who decided to forcibly remove the Japanese American community had bothered to do their research, they could have easily determined that the Nisei and many Issei were already fully versed in American culture of the 1940s. Ultimately, it was not the Japanese American community who failed to adapt to the American way of life, but rather the white Americans who refused to allow Americans of Japanese descent - like so many other communities of color, to be seen as full members of American society.

ROB BUSCHER: *Look Toward the Mountain* is presented by the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Written by Ray Locker and Rob Buscher. Produced, Edited, and Hosted by Rob Buscher. Voice overs sourced by Darrell Kunitomi. Special thanks to Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project. Many of the oral histories used in this podcast series were provided by Densho. Visit the Heart Mountain website for a full list of credits.

ROB BUSCHER: This concludes the first season of *Look Toward the Mountain*. Stay tuned for updates on new episodes, and extras.