

NATIVE PEOPLES ARTS & LIFEWAYS

R. Carlos Nakai (NAVAJO/UTE)

R. Carlos Nakai has made traditional Native American flute a part of the musical landscape without diluting his spiritual or musical beliefs. "I'm little interested in integrating my culture into the greater American focus," Nakai says. "I'm bringing people into the Native tradition, not taking Native traditional to them."

Nakai first made an impact on the "greater culture" with *Natives* (Canyon Records), a collaboration with pianist Peter Kater that topped Billboard's New Age chart, and *Canyon Trilogy*, which recently went gold, his first album to hit this industry benchmark.

Nakai is a restless artist, and he's taken the Native flute in many unexpected directions. He has collaborated with Grammy-winning jazz flutist Paul Horn, most recently on *Inside Monument Valley*, and his jazz band, the Nakai Quartet, complements his improvisations with African and Latin rhythms. "African, Latin and Native styles were impacted by colonialism," Nakai reminds us. "Don Cherry (Comanche) and Jim Pepper (Kaw) encouraged me to take from the outer culture to revitalize our own."

Nakai's excursions have made him Native music's first superstar and a role model to up and coming Native musicians. "The Native flute is made from materials that are part of this land, and its sound seems to reconnect people to the land," Nakai says. "Even if your ancestors were European, you are now part of this land, which you may not like to hear coming from a Native, but you have to learn who you now are, so we can interact to honor the land."—JP