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## **R. Carlos Nakai**

Of Navajo-Ute heritage, R. Carlos Nakai is the world's premier performer of the Native American flute. Nakai began his musical studies on the trumpet but his musical interests took a turn when he was given a traditional cedar wood flute as a gift and challenged to see what he could do with it. His first album, *Changes*, was released by Canyon Records in 1983 and since then he has released over thirty-five recordings with Canyon plus additional albums and guest appearances on other labels. In addition to his educational workshops and residencies, Nakai has appeared as a soloist throughout the United States, Europe and Japan and has collaborated with such artists as guitarist/luthier William Eaton and composers James DeMars and Phillip Glass among many others.

Nakai, while well grounded in the traditional uses of the flute, began finding new musical settings including the genres of world, new age, jazz, and classical. Nakai founded the ethnic jazz ensemble, the R. Carlos Nakai Quartet, which allows him to explore the use of Native American musical elements in the jazz idiom. In a cross-cultural foray, he performed extensively with the Wind Travelin' Band, a traditional Japanese ensemble from Kyoto and together they released an album, *Island of Bows*. Additional works with ethnic artists include *In A Distant Place* with Tibetan flutist and singer Nawang Khechog and *Our Beloved Land* with famed Hawaiian slack key guitarist and singer Keola Beamer.

Nakai brought the flute into the concert hall, performing with over fifteen symphony and chamber orchestras. He was a featured soloist on the Philip Glass composition, *Piano Concerto No. 2: After Lewis & Clark*, premeired by the Omaha Symphony. Nakai also works with producer Billy Williams, a two-time GRAMMY® winner, in orchestral works for the flute in a lighter vein.

Nakai has received two gold records (500,000 units sold in the U.S.) for *Canyon Trilogy* and *Earth Spirit* (the first Native American recordings to earn this achievement) and has sold over 4 million albums in the course of his career. In 1994 Nakai's third collaboration with Eaton, *Ancestral Voices*, was a GRAMMY® Awards Nominee for Best Traditional Folk Album. In 2000 he earned a rare double nomination in the same category for *Inner Voices* and *Inside Monument Valley* as GRAMMY® Nominees for Best New Age Album. Other GRAMMY® nominations include *In A Distant Place* (2001 Nominee for Best New Age Album), *Fourth World* (2002 Nominee for Best New Age Album), *Sanctuary* (2003 Nominee for Best Native American Album), *People of Peace* (2004 Nominee for Best New Age Album), *Reconnections* (2008 Nominee for Best Native American Album) and *Dancing Into Silence* (2010).

A Navy veteran, Nakai has earned a Master's Degree in American Indian Studies from the University of Arizona. He was awarded the Arizona Governor's Arts Award in 1992 and an honorary doctorate from Northern Arizona University in 1994. Nakai has also co-authored a book with composer James DeMars, *The Art of the Native American Flute*, which is a guide to performing the traditional cedar flute and includes transcriptions of Nakai's songs.

Nakai's career has been shaped by a desire to communicate a sense of Native American culture and society that transcends the common stereotypes presented in mass media.