

Canyon Records Productions

4143 NORTH 16TH STREET • SUITE 6 • PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85016 • (602) 266-7835 • FAX (602) 279-9233

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Contact: Kelly Burke
602/266-7835

R. CARLOS NAKAI EARNS FIRST NATIVE GOLD

PHOENIX, AZ (May 1998) -- Native American flutist R. Carlos Nakai has just earned the first gold record for Native American music. Nakai's **Canyon Trilogy**, produced and distributed by Canyon Records of Phoenix, Arizona, has sold more than 500,000 units in the U.S and was recently certified for a gold record by the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA). This award is a particularly remarkable achievement because it was accomplished in the genre of Native American music and by a small independent record company.

In order to accommodate Nakai's touring schedule, a formal presentation to him by Robert Doyle, president of Canyon Records will be made this summer in Tucson, Arizona, Nakai's home.

For Nakai, of Navajo-Ute heritage and recognized as the world's premier performer of the Native American flute, the award was never among his career objectives: "I never gave it a thought and am quite surprised about the whole thing." Nakai was also a GRAMMY® Awards finalist in 1994.

Canyon Trilogy was released in 1989 to a world ready for its pure, evocative sound. According to both Doyle and Nakai, the album earned the gold for "having the right sound at the right time for the right audience." People were looking for an attractive, accessible experience with Native American culture and music.

They found it in **Canyon Trilogy**. Nakai's compositions and improvisations for solo Native American flute conjure images of the American West and evoke Native American life. Listeners are offered a meditative and personal experience with a simplicity that touches them on a very physical level. "These improvised statements from a truly personal space are what listeners like," says Nakai in explaining the album's longevity.

One of the **Canyon Trilogy's** strengths was that it was conceived as a complete one hour soundscape rather than stringing disparate, unrelated songs together. It also marked Nakai's foray into digital manipulation, which he began using in the studio and in concert after attending a workshop given by famed flutist Paul Horn in the mid-1980s.

"While the gold record is a symbol of commercial success," points out Doyle, "it also indicates **Canyon Trilogy's** influence and reach into the mainstream culture. For a great many people, Nakai is the first name that comes to them when they think of Native American music." While other artists of Native American heritage or mixed heritage have earned gold records, they have been for non-Native American genres like rock, folk or pop. "Nakai has earned the first gold record for Native American music," explains Doyle, "which we define as music directly related to the original culture."

Nakai acknowledges that the gold record is the result of a mutually respectful relationship with Canyon Records. "I could not have done this alone," he notes. "Canyon is exceptionally receptive to my journey of life in music, allowing me to do my own music on my own terms. But I place the responsibility for my success fully upon my shoulders and don't have unreasonable expectations of Canyon Records."

Credited with the renaissance of the flute within and out of native cultures, Nakai has continued to meld his classical training with his expertise on the flute to form a complex, sophisticated sound that covers the spectrum of musical genres: jazz ensembles, piano and guitar collaborations, and the concert hall.

2 - 2 - 2 - R. Carlos Nakai Earns First Native GOLD - 2 - 2 - 2

He has toured throughout the U.S., Europe and Japan and has appeared with the Phoenix, Tucson, California, San Juan, Saskatoon and Anchorage symphonies. His collaborators include Paul Horn, pianist Peter Kater, guitarist William Eaton and composer James DeMars. His third collaboration with Eaton, 1994's **Ancestral Voices**, was a GRAMMY® Awards finalist for Best Traditional Folk Music. Nakai also founded the ethnic jazz ensemble, R. Carlos Nakai Quartet.

Since **Canyon Trilogy's** release in 1989, Nakai feels he has come full circle to more traditional sounds and is currently exploring, through his quartet, the formal jazz idiom with its meshing of traditional motifs and improvisation.

Nakai's other credits include two books. In hopes of inspiring potential flutists, he authored with composer James DeMars **The Art of the Native American Flute**, a guide to performing the traditional cedar flute. Yet to be published, **A Coyote in the Outer World** deals with contemporary Native American issues.

A Navy veteran, Nakai earned a Master's Degree in American Indian Studies from the University of Arizona, and received an honorary doctorate from Northern Arizona University in 1994. He also was the recipient of the Arizona Governor's Arts Award in 1992 and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the First American in the Arts in 1993.

For Nakai, the gold record portends little change in his life as a musician, performer and educator. He will continue to define his role as an ethnic artist not to reiterate the past, but to seek new avenues and voices of expression for traditional and contemporary native cultures of America. "For me," he says, "life is a series of possibilities without bounds or limitations. I live primarily to have a good time of it."

Doyle foresees no change in direction or focus for Canyon Records. "We will continue to help Native American artists, both traditional and contemporary, fulfill their artistic potential and aspirations," states Doyle, "and remain focused on fulfilling the needs of the Native American community. We have been and will always be a grassroots company."

Since beginning his career with Canyon Records in 1983, Nakai has recorded over 21 albums with the label marking over 2.5 million units in sales.

Canyon Records, headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, is in its 47th year of producing and distributing traditional and contemporary Native American music. The label recently expanded its musical genres to include new music of the Southwest. Sound clips of Nakai's and other Native American music can be accessed at Canyon's website at <http://www.canyonrecords.com>