

# Transcendence

## CREATIVE DYNAMO ROBBY ROMERO

Clothing by  
Patricia Michaels

Robby Romero (Apache/Tewa) spent Independence Day 2009 at the Red Lake Nation in Minnesota, commemorating the historic agreement of 1889. “We were honoring the seven chiefs who resisted

complying with the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 and celebrating the release of *Old Times*, a record I produced for the legendary Red Lake Singers,” Romero says. “The recording preserves and captures old songs and an old style of Ojibwe singing. The elders came into

the studio, recalled songs from as early as the 1920s that they had learned from their grandfathers, fathers and uncles, and laid them down.”

After the weekend, Romero returned to the offices of Eagle Thunder Entertainment, the multimedia company he runs, to write songs with his daughter, Dakota René. “She sang ‘My Mistake’ on my album *America’s Last Frontier* when she was 14,” Romero explained. “She just graduated with a B.A. in music; we’re preparing songs for her debut album.”


But this was just the tip of his creative iceberg. Romero is one of the busiest musicians in Indian Country: an activist, songwriter and filmmaker with an inter-

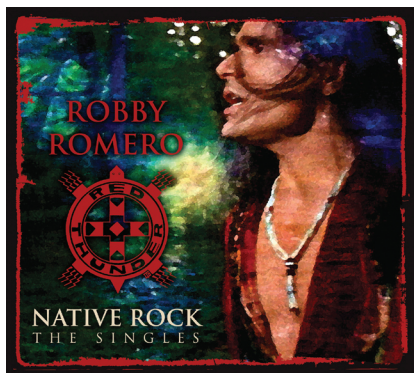
national reputation and an impressive résumé. He created Native Children’s Survival (NCS), a nonprofit organization, to raise awareness of ecological and children’s issues by building schools and funding grassroots organizations that fight for the health of the Earth. He’s produced three critically acclaimed music “rockumentaries” to further the message of NCS: *America’s Last Frontier*, *Hidden Medicine* and *Makoce Wakan*. They were noted for their innovative combination of music and filmmaking and were hits on MTV, VH1, the Sundance Channel and SABC in South Africa. One of Romero’s music videos, “Is It Too Late,” was broadcast around the world from Moscow’s Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders in 1990. With his band Red Thunder, he’s played all over the world and will be touring this fall to support his newest release, *Native Rock, The Singles*, a collection of new, live and earlier popular works previously released in Indian Country.

Romero grew up in New Mexico and Hollywood, California, surrounded by music. His father worked in film and television production; his mother was a dancer and actress who appeared in Elvis Presley films like *Viva Las Vegas*. “When I was 13, I began playing cantinas in Taos Plaza with my sister Joanelle,” Romero says. He taught himself drums, accordion and piano before he was 9, but he

fell in love with the guitar after getting a Fender Stratocaster from an uncle. Still in his teens, Romero sat in on sessions with Jesse Ed Davis and Van Dyke Parks, toured with Rick Danko, and recorded with Gene Clark and Paul Butterfield. Then he attended a life-changing gathering of the American Indian Movement and a concert by Buffy Sainte-Marie and XIT, prompting him to create a new style he calls Native Rock.

“By weaving traditional and contemporary instruments and featuring Native drums instead of a Western drum kit, Native Rock transcends mortality with the spirit of our ancestors and the heartbeat of Mother Earth,” Romero says. He then started writing politically and spiritually charged songs that addressed the plight of Indigenous people all over the world and never looked back.

In 2006, Romero founded Eagle Thunder Entertainment so he could control his recording, touring and music-publishing business. He started producing albums for the powwow groups Red Lake Singers and P. Town Boyz, as well as writing, producing and directing his own film and music, often featuring traditional artists from all over the world. With his hectic schedule, one can’t help but wonder when he finds time to sleep these days. Romero laughs at the question. “Like music, life is all about finding the time.” —



### Robby Romero

*Native Rock,  
The Singles*  
www.robbyromero.com

### Red Lake Singers

*Old Times*  
redlakesingers.com

### P. Town Boyz

*P. Town Boyz*  
ptboyz.com

### Eagle Thunder Entertainment

P.O. Box 1115  
Taos, NM 87571  
505/204-8077  
www.eaglethunder.com

### Buffy Sainte-Marie Running for the Drum

Appleseed Records  
P.O. Box 2593  
West Chester, PA 19380  
610/701-5755  
appleseedmusic.com or  
soundofamerica.com

Buffy Sainte-Marie took two years to produce *Running for the Drum*, and her attention to detail shows in every track. The album is one of her best, possibly her most diverse collection to date, incorporating powwow singing, electronic dance music, rock ‘n’ roll, folk, R&B, rockabilly and pop. Her incomparable voice is as vibrant as ever; she doesn’t sound like she’s aged a day since *It’s My Way*, released 45 years ago.

The album opens with a trio of protest songs combining powwow music with contemporary dance beats: “No No Keshagesh” excoriates the

culture of greed that’s destroying the Earth, “Cho Cho Fire” calls people to action in service of the greater good, and “Working for the Government” is a thumping techno put down of the warmongers and profiteers. “I Bet My Heart on You” is a New Orleans-flavored R&B tune with a retro feel and great piano work by Taj Mahal. “Blue Sunday” is a rockabilly rave-up that pays tribute to the sound of Elvis Presley with a tune that brings to mind “Mystery Train” and “Heartbreak Hotel.” Monte Horton and Chris Birkett lay down smoking guitar solos to complement Sainte-Marie’s puckish vocal. “Amer-

ica the Beautiful” reinvents the song with new words that salute the people who were here when Columbus landed. The album also includes several new love songs: “To the Ends of the World” is a simmering R&B marked by Sainte-Marie’s dramatic vocals and piano, “When I Had You” is a jazzy late-night blues, and “Still This Love Goes On” is a jubilant feeling celebration of the Earth and all its creatures.

Every track here packs the power and passion that has made Sainte-Marie an iconic presence, not only in the United States, but around the world.