



New Mexico MAGAZINE



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Music - December 2011

Johnny Whitehorse Rides Again

Story by **Emily Drabanski**

Robert Mirabal steps out as one of his favorite characters, Johnny Whitehorse, for his latest CD, *Riders of the Healing Road*. The Taos Pueblo artist stretches the boundaries of the Native flute to create global sounds.

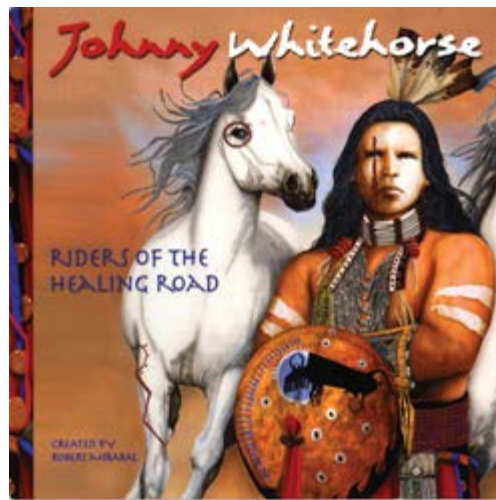
"This recording is based on the medicine people who bring a vitality into societies around the world," Mirabal says. "The sounds I create are pushing my music into a new world-music genre that people can relate to everywhere." While the song "Rituals of Winter" best reflects Mirabal's own Pueblo healing traditions, his is not a typical mellow, New Age healing album. In fact, some of the songs, such as "Hand Tremblers," have lyrics with a very edgy quality.

Mirabal has made and played Native flutes for several decades. In the 1990s, he made a splash in the music world with his tribal-rock touring band, Mirabal, and about a dozen recordings. His performances blending music and spoken word garnered critical acclaim, and his 2001 PBS show, *Music from the Painted Cave*, evolved into a top-selling CD and DVD.

As an artist, Mirabal says he's always challenging himself to find a different way to tell stories. Last summer he starred in his stirring, one-person theatrical production, *Po'pay Speaks*, about the leader of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

For the Johnny Whitehorse recordings, he developed new flutes with Brent Haines of Salt Lake City, Utah. "By playing double-chamber flutes, I'm able to play two melodies at the same time. I'm also fascinated by dealing in different scales than the traditional pentatonic scale." His second Whitehorse CD, *Totemic Flute Chants*, won a Grammy, and *Riders of the Healing Road* was nominated for the award last year.

For those looking for a holiday CD, Mirabal's *Pueblo Christmas* CD from 2007 offers a refreshing take on traditional songs.



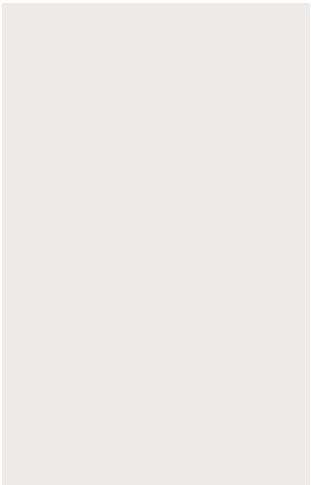
Play "Rituals of Winter" from *Riders of the Healing Road*



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