Explore Native American Heritage this Month.

The National Music Museum, along with the Smithsonian Institution and other affiliates across the country are exploring how American Indians maintain Indigenous sovereignty while contributing to the cultural fabric of the US through exhibits, events and online content.

Celebrate with us!

During your visit....

Watch for these symbols throughout the galleries. They showcase some of the Native Americans who have contributed to musical history through their work as performers, and makers, along with their instruments!

Throughout the month...

Attend a Native American Heritage month event:
si.edu/events/native-american-heritage-month

Learn more online with the ***Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's*** digital exhibitions showcasing Native American women, art, and language as well as insightful podcasts.

Follow the NMM's social media sites for additional information and posts.

Share what you've learned!
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Clayton & Odessa Lang Ofstad Foundation Support for Native American Instruments

Museum collections grow through the donation and purchase of objects, which typically occurs opportunistically. Thanks to the generosity of the Clayton & Odessa Lang Ofstad Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., Co-Trustee, the NMM has been able to acquire several contemporary musical instruments made by Native American makers.

Through multi-year grant awards, the NMM has been able to acquire the following instruments from Native peoples across the nation.

Rattle by Eugene Alfred (Tlingit / Northern Tutchone), Pelly Crossing, Yukon, Canada, 2021. NMM 15664.

Rattle by Charlie Johnson (Kwakwaka'wakw), Kingcome Inlet, British Columbia, Canada, 1993. NMM 15665.

Flute by Tim Blueflint Ramel (Bad River Chippewa / Comanche), Clearlake Oaks, California, 2022. NMM 15666.

Drum by Fox Spears (Karuk), Seattle, Washington, 2020. NMM 15667.

Rattle by Charish Leclair (Minneconjou Lakota), Rapid City, South Dakota, 2018. NMM 15668.

Rattle by Frank Poolheco (Hopi Tewa), Winslow, Arizona, 1989. NMM 15669.

Drum by Dakota Drum Company, painted by Sonja Holy Eagle (Oglala Lakota), Rapid City, South Dakota, June 2022. NMM 15671.

Guitar by Bajoquintos Y Guitarras Rochis, Paracho, decorated by Gregorio Medina (Wixárika / Huichol), Zitakua, Mexico, ca. 2021. NMM 15899.

Whistle by Rodney Smith (Oweekeno Wuikinuxv / Kwakwaka'wakw), Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, ca. 2023. NMM 15900.

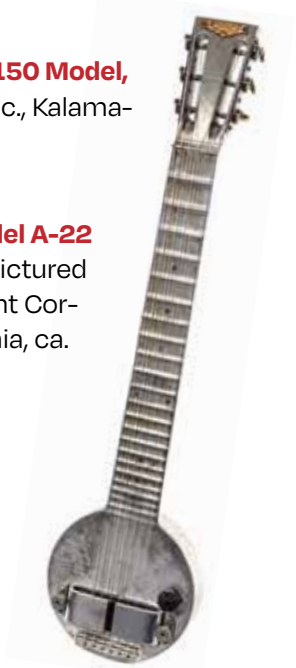


INSTRUMENT

Electric Hawaiian Guitar: EH-150 Model, Serial No. EGE 2817 Gibson, Inc., Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1940

INSTRUMENT

Electric Hawaiian Guitar: Model A-22 Frying Pan, Serial No. B232 (pictured right) Electro String Instrument Corporation, Los Angeles, California, ca. 1934



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Lamont Gallery

MAKER

Sonja Silva Holy Eagle is a contemporary female artist who participates in her tribe's traditional drum-making by painting drums at the Dakota Drum Company.

INSTRUMENT

Frame drum: Čháŋčheğa Sonja Holy Eagle, (Oglala Lakota) Rapid City, South Dakota, 2022

MAKER

Tim Blueflint Ramel (1963–) is dedicated to preserving ancestral traditions. However, like flute music itself, Ramel has evolved his flute-making into the realm of fine art.

INSTRUMENT

End-Blown Flute, G Tim Blueflint Ramel, (Bad River Chippewa / Comanche) Clearlake Oaks, California, 2022

Cutler Gallery

Drums, rattles, whistles, and flutes are common instruments in Native American spiritual expression. Instruments support prayer and song, helping people communicate with ancestors or the Creator. Although the experience is highly personal and tribal customs vary, creativity is often expressed within the structure of dances, songs, and chants.

Native people of the Great Plains have practiced communal drumming since time immemorial. But the sacred act of making and playing drums changed radically in the mid-to late-1800s as Native Americans were persecuted by the US government: gatherings banned, land and instruments seized, children forced to boarding schools, native languages prohibited, traditions disrupted. Before such oppression, the custom was many voices, many drums: people gathered freely to sing and play. Afterward, secret gatherings might feature a single drum played softly. Although government policies eventually changed, the practice of playing a single drum remained.

ARTIST

Oscar Howe (1915–1983) Bright colors and clean lines create motion, capturing the exuberant expressions of the tribal dances and ceremonies Howe often painted . His insistence that Native artists be recognized for creativity — not just tradition — made him a trailblazer.

ART

Sioux Love Song: Reproduction Print. Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Dakota), Vermillion, South Dakota, ca. 1965

MAKER **PERFORMER**

Jerome Kills Small is dedicated to the traditional ways. He makes fine drums, grows time-honored foods and medicines, and builds sweat lodges. He passes on these traditions through masterful storytelling, teaching history and the spiritual ways of the Lakota.



INSTRUMENT

Frame Drum: Čháŋčheğa Jerome Kills Small (Oglala Lakota), Utica, South Dakota, 2020

INSTRUMENT

Rattle: Kanyahte' ka'nowa' Iroquois People, Northeastern North America, ca. 1875-1925

Listen to these stories on the interactive display!

Jennifer Kreisberg Tuscarora composer, singer, and musician

Serene Thin Elk is a Lakota therapist and flutist.

Knudson Gallery

INSTRUMENT

Bassoon, C Maker Unknown, Germany, ca. 1915-1930

Larson Gallery

INSTRUMENT

Thunderbird Rattle Charlie Johnson (Kwakwaka'wakw, Kingcome Inlet, British Columbia, Canada.1993.

Lillibridge Gallery

The island chain of Hawaii has had an outsized impact on American music. For centuries, Native Hawaiians sang, chanted, and used percussion. In the late 1800s, they began experimenting with stringed instruments introduced by Portuguese immigrants.

MAKER **PERFORMER**

Joseph Kekuku (1874–1932) grew up on the island of Oahu listening to, singing, and playing traditional Hawaiian music. As a teenager, he was tinkering with a guitar when inspiration struck: what if he raised the strings and ran a steel bar over the neck? He loved the sounds this new technique produced — and so did others. Kekuku had invented the Hawaiian steel guitar.

MAKER

Jonah Kumalae (1875–1940) Jonah Kumalae's ukuleles were honored at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco, leading to a surge in sales. His ukuleles were popular with tourists and mainlanders alike.