

# the Taos Hum

story by TANIA CASSELLE  
photos by LENNY FOSTER

There is no other small town on earth that has as many colorful folks as Taos--and writer Tania Casselle seems to know them all. We love our new monthly column and hope you do, too. Now, let's meet two more people who make Taos hum....



## Cherie Burns

Zippering around Taos in her MX-5 Miata, Cherie Burns is as glamorous as the subject of her latest book, *Searching for Beauty: The Life of Millicent Rogers*, published by St. Martin's Press. Although Burns was, as she puts it, "never a car person" back in New York City, she certainly catches the eye now with her car top down and her Australian cattle dog riding in the back. "In a car like that you have to either take your husband or your dog," observes Burns. "Often the dog gets to come."

A journalist and author of books including *The Great Hurricane: 1938*, Burns formerly lived in Nantucket and Manhattan but frequently visited New Mexico (and attended high school in Colorado). "I always understood there was life west of the Hudson, always had a sense that I wanted to be in Taos. I had a visceral connection to it. It's a very casual yet sophisticated community."

Burns' custom of taking guests to the Millicent Rogers Museum inspired her biography of the Standard Oil heiress and fashion icon. Burns was looking for a new book subject and realized that she'd found a story that extended well beyond Taos. One surprising discovery arose from Rogers' letters to Dorothy Brett revealing "great affection, even love, towards Tony Luhan." Burns found no evidence that Rogers acted upon that feeling toward Mabel Dodge Luhan's husband. "As freewheeling as she was, she didn't cross that line." Rogers was not the only woman to put Tony Luhan on a pedestal. "Georgia O'Keeffe also thought he was the cat's meow," she says.

Burns finds that Taos is a good place to write. "You can be very directed and keep your head down, do your work, come out and connect with people when you want to." In her downtime, Burns hikes, skis and appreciates that "almost every night of the week if you want to hear music, there's somewhere to go." The Taos Inn is a top pick for the social scene, and she enjoys eating at The Love Apple. She's also a regular at World Cup cafe. "You could learn a lot about Taos sitting in there."

*Burns talks about Millicent Rogers at Fort Burgwin on August 7 and Taos Public Library August 18. Find out about her books and events at [www.cherieburns.com](http://www.cherieburns.com).*

## Frederick Aragón

As an illustrator, painter, singer, Native American flute player, actor and filmmaker, Rick Aragón lives and breathes creativity. He performed in *Taos the Movie*, won the 2008 New Mexico Governor's Cup Short Animation Competition for *Coyote Tales: Mystery's Night* and scooped a 2009 New Mexico New Visions Award for another film, *Dark Is My Light*, based on his song about *curanderas*. Oh—and by day he works at the Habitat for Humanity store, where you might find him making DIY creations. "It's all about repurposing and recycling, the artist's way," he says.

Of Navajo, Hispanic, Chinese and Anglo descent, Aragón was raised in Arizona and started visiting Taos when his father retired there. He was always keen to return home until Taos captured him one Christmas. In Aragón's words: "Something just bit me in the butt." He's lived in Taos for 16 years, saying that while the land is breathtaking, "I came here because of the cool people."

Aragón paints and plays flute at Acuarelas Studio Gallery on Saturdays through October and often works on several paintings, bouncing back and forth between them. "Right now I have five paintings started. That's what will be fun at the gallery; it won't be boring." Despite his many work and arts activities (among them playing flute at weddings), Aragón describes himself as a homebody, happy to tinker around on projects and on the computer "like a mad creative scientist." One experiment was *Rick Aragón's 5 Chile Challenge* on YouTube. "I love hot stuff, but I'd never tried ghost chiles," says Aragón, who likes to munch the super-fiery peppers, also known as Jolokias, to find out if he can still sing afterwards. (He can, rather beautifully.) The Chile Challenge also gave him a chance to learn video special effects, handy for illustrating his mounting pain. "I'm inquisitive," he says. "I try to figure out a way to do it, conquer it, and move on to the next thing."

Nature is a great inspiration. "There are all kind of hidden things in Taos," Aragón muses. "See the skull in the mountain? Even at Albertsons, you can look at the mountain and see it's almost like a perfect skull."

*Find out more at [frederickaragon.com](http://frederickaragon.com). Acuarelas Studio Gallery is at 125 North Taos Plaza, 575.751.7263.*