

BLACK ELVIS

BY ANNA ROSE

A man of the Gomeroi Nation, **ROGER KNOX** is widely regarded as “the Black Elvis” or the Koori King of Country.

PHOTO: NICOLETTE DIXON

Born in the North West NSW town of Moree, and raised on the Toomelah Aboriginal mission, near Goondiwindi, Roger has risen to great heights in the music industry.

Despite his humble beginnings and painful shyness, nothing was to deter him from performing on the world stage.

In a career spanning 30 years or more, Roger has sung in England, America, Canada and throughout Australia.

Roger never held aspirations to become a singer. He fancied himself more as a sportsman and enjoyed football and boxing in his teenage years.

It was boxing that first brought him to Tamworth, which was where his country music career took off, once he was encouraged to perform on stage at Joe Maguire’s Pub by

GENTLEMAN GEOFF BROWN.

“That changed my whole way of thinking,” Roger said.

“**ALBERT DENNISON** used to sing in our communities and he took me to Joe Maguire’s after a week of working on the tobacco farms around Moore Creek.

“There we met up with people like Geoff Brown, **MARGARET CARMICHAEL, MICHAEL COOKE**

and **BUDDY BISHOP.** Before then, I had never sung in front of non-Indigenous people.

“I was really scared and I didn’t want to do it, but when I did, and got that applause, I began to feel good about it.”

Even with all this encouragement from people like **ERIC SCOTT, ERIC WATSON, ROSS MURPHY** and **JOHN MINSON,** who knew he could play guitar and sing, Roger didn’t set his sights on a career on stage until he saw **COL HARDY** performing at a 2TM concert at the Tamworth Town Hall.

Then Roger began a career that would inspire countless others in many ways.

His survival from a horrific plane crash that claimed the life of drummer **KEN RAMSEY,** on the **BRIAN YOUNG** outback tour of Australia, was a huge turning point for the aspiring artist.

With burns to 95 per cent of his body, Roger was unable to play the guitar, but fortunately, his voice was unchanged by the near-

death experience.

He spent months in hospital in Adelaide – and years in bed. He had to learn to walk all over again and at many times, he wondered if he would ever make it back from that dark, lonely place.

“People like Col Hardy inspired me to get back into music,” Roger said.

“It was really hard. I couldn’t stand up and play guitar any more. I used to play bass and lead, but with my hands injured, I couldn’t – so I asked my son **BUDDY KNOX** to learn guitar, and he left school and came on the road with me.”

Roger’s groundbreaking album, recorded at Enrec Studios in Tamworth, *Give It A Go*, was the catalyst for a whole new beginning for Indigenous musicians in Australia.

As **TROY CASSAR-DALEY** points out in his story – “if Roger and his sons could give it a go – why couldn’t we?”

Roger continues to record and inspire others, and is working on a number of community projects just outside of Warwick, in Queensland, where he is now based.

There is a new album to be launched in August and that’s just the start of this inspiring artist’s plans for the future.

“Some day I’ll cross the river and sit in the shade of the trees, but not for a while yet,” he said.

“These days I’m into self-preservation, something I didn’t do for a long time. The closer you get to God, the more you start looking after yourself.

“Now I’m 21 and a couple of long, long days, I’m doing just that and enjoying my life.”