Australia’s ‘Black Elvis’: Songs of Aboriginal Heritage

Roger Knox, known to Australian fans as Black Elvis, sings Folk, Country, and Rock songs by Aboriginal artists in his newest album, Stranger in My Land. (album photo courtesy of Bloodshot Records)

On this weekend’s episode of National Geographic Weekend, host Boyd Matson interviews Aboriginal Australian Country & Western singer Roger Knox about his latest album Stranger In My Land. His Folk, Country and rock ‘n’ roll-hybrid songs were written by Aborigine artists – some handed-down over generations, but not widely sung. In our conversation, Roger shares why he loves country music’s ability to tell a story and how many people in Australia’s native populations balk at the concept of being “Australian”.

Roger’s Australian fans have nicknamed him “Black Elvis”, but the rawness of Roger’s message bears reminders to the era of American folk protest songs of Pete Seeger. Knox’s lyrics describe an anger with the Australian government for their persecution of the Aboriginal peoples, and a love for the land that they lived on for thousands of years before European settlers colonized Australia.

The album’s title song, “Stranger In My Country,” describe the hard feelings after forced removals of Aboriginal peoples from their homeland. Roger tells Boyd, this song “tells how we see it. Not necessarily how other people see it for us.” Listen below:
Roger Knox with Andre Williams, "Stranger In My Country"

A softer, sadder tune describes the Australian government’s policy of forcefully removing Aboriginal children from their parents in an effort to assimilate the Aboriginal children to the European-Australian culture. "Took the Children Away", is a song close to Roger because his own mother was taken from her parents at eight months old. He says his mom found her way back home when she was 18 years old, but, like many others who returned to their Aboriginal families, it was a struggle because she no longer knew the Aboriginal songs, stories and traditions.

Not all of the album’s melodies, however, tell stories of Aboriginal hardship. Some songs praise Australia’s landscape and wildlife. The song "Arafura Pearl" boasts of the beauty in the northern town of Darwin. Listen below:

Stranger in My Land shares what life is like belonging to an endangered culture through its range of musical styles and emotions. To see and hear more of Roger’s storytelling, check out this video from Bloodshot Records where he explains the pride he has for his people or visit the album website.

Keywords: Aboriginal, Aborigine, Australia, Bloodshot Records, Country & Western, Country Music, Darwin, Endangered Culture, Folk Music, music, Radio Show, Rock N’ Roll, Roger Knox, songs, Stranger in My Land

Comments

1. John C
   New Jersey, USA
   August 3, 7:33 am

   I’m not an Australian aboriginal, but I very much like Mr. Knox’s new album. He has such a warm and expressive voice.

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