

Indigenous Rap: Young Australian of the Year **B1**



NADC/Broken Yellow

Just before Australia Day, 26 January, every year, the country honours the Australians of the Year: citizens who have made a major contribution to making other people's lives better. This year's Young Australian of the Year is Danzal Baker, alias Baker Boy, a 22-year-old Indigenous Australian who raps in three languages. As well as achieving success in rap, dance and graffiti, Baker mentors Indigenous youth to help them achieve their dreams.

Danzal is from Arnhem Land, the most northern part of Australia, in the Northern Territory. About 25.5 per cent of the population in the Northern Territory is Indigenous. Nationally, three per cent of the population is Indigenous.

Danzal already spoke two Indigenous languages before learning English. He was a dancer from a young age, hip-hop but also traditional Indigenous dance. He was part of the dance group Djuki Mala, and travelled all over Australia to perform.

Listen to the Baker Boy

He loved rap but when he tried to do it himself he struggled to be fluent rapping in English. It wasn't until he tried rapping in *Yolnu Matha*, his first language, that the rap began to flow.



NADC/Salty Dingo

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In 2017, his single “Marryuna” was 17th in the Top 100 tracks of the year in Australia – a first for a song in an Aboriginal language. U.S. and British rappers 50 Cent and Dizzee Rascal asked him to accompany them on their Australian tours.

Our Language

Danzal grew up in an isolated community where his native language had survived. But many other Australian Indigenous languages have become extinct: only 17 are still truly spoken as native tongues out of approximately 250 that existed when European colonisers arrived in 1788. The Australian government tried to “civilise” Aboriginal children and forced them to go to boarding schools far from their families, and where they were punished if they didn’t speak English. Those children, now adults, are referred to as the “Stolen Generation”. Many of their native languages have died out.

Danzal Baker wants to show that Indigenous culture is alive and valuable. He works with Indigenous Hip-Hop Projects, which does one-week projects in different Indigenous communities using music, dance and street-art to help young people express themselves.

Danzal says he uses his rap to show the living nature of Indigenous languages. “It’s something different and especially around the world it shows that Australia has native languages here and everyone still speaks it,” he says.

By using both English and *Yolnu Matha* in his lyrics, he hopes “*Balanda* [white people] will be curious about it and then learn the language so they can understand what I’m saying. Then they’ll want to learn more language and try and connect to the community – it’s like my secret way of pulling everyone together, I guess.”

As he accepted his Young Australian of the Year Award, he said in his speech, “This message goes out to my fellow young Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous girls and boys in every corner of the country. Every single one of us matters, our stories, our voices matter.

“With love and respect we have the power to shape the future and make Australia a place where we are all proud, where we all belong and where we stand united.”



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The didgeridoo is a traditional Aboriginal instrument.



Traditional dancing at the Garma Festival in the Northern Territory.



Indigenous tourist guides in the Northern Territory.



Aboriginal rock paintings in Arnhem Land.