

Mr Jimmy Little

The degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) was conferred upon Jimmy Little at the Arts ceremony held at 2.00pm on 3 June 2005.



Jimmy Little, *photo, courtesy University of Sydney.*

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Mr Jimmy Little for the admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa).

Jimmy Little is an indigenous Australian, born on the Cummeragunga Mission in 1937. Jimmy came from a musical family and, although he was forced to leave school at 15, spent the next 44 years as a musician, actor and educator, breaking down barriers for indigenous Australians throughout this country.

In the 1960s Jimmy Little recorded “Royal Telephone” which sold 75,000 copies and earned him gold record status as a performer. This happened at a time when Aboriginal people were not recognised as Australian citizens.

Jimmy Little has been described as the ‘Father of Reconciliation’ and through his music, life and work has tried to appreciate both sides of any argument or dispute between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and, as he has said, he preferred to “walk softly, softly, and speak softly, softly”. In 1985, the Eora Centre in Redfern recognised Jimmy’s unique talents and offered him work teaching and mentoring indigenous music students.

Jimmy remains committed to indigenous and non-indigenous education and continues to use his national and international recognition along with his success as an entertainer to promote positive education strategies. In 1989 Jimmy was named Aboriginal Australian of the Year by the National Aboriginal Day of Observance Committee (NADOC).

In 1996, Jimmy collaborated with a non-Indigenous musician to produce a brilliant and commercially

successful album entitled "Messenger" which resulted in an ARIA award for Best Adult Contemporary album. This success was followed by Jimmy's induction into the ARIA Hall of Fame in 1999.

In 2000 Jimmy Little, while an Ambassador for Literacy and Numeracy for the Department of Education, Science and Training, was invited by Indigenous students from the University of Sydney to officiate at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Week celebrations. Since then he has honoured the University, and particularly the Koori Centre, by becoming an invaluable member of our distinguished guest lecturing staff.

At the height of his resurgence in 2001, Jimmy was diagnosed with kidney failure necessitating daily dialysis treatment, but this did not curb his drive to perform. In early 2004, while touring through remote towns of Western Australia, he received news of an organ match. With limited hours to return to Sydney for surgery he raced against time and successfully underwent a kidney transplant.

2004 saw Jimmy awarded an Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List in recognition of his work in the entertainment world and for his positive contribution to the Reconciliation process.

In addition to the preceding Order of Australia award and Aboriginal Australian of the Year in 1989, Jimmy has also received the following commendations and awards:

- in 2003 Red Ochre Award from the Australia Council;
- in 2003 NSW Senior Australian of the Year;
- in Deadly Sounds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music, Sport, Entertainment & Community Awards (the "DEADLYS") for: Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal Music; Male Artist of the Year; Best Single of the Year and Country Music of the Year; and
- in 1994 Tamworth Country Music Roll of Renown.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) the inspirational Mr Jimmy Little, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.