

Yes Sir – James is ready to rocket

With a voice and maturity beyond his years, teenage singing sensation Eran James is on the fast track to success as he prepares to join Elton John on his Australian tour, writes **Christina Swaneveld**

ERAN James had just arrived at a mechanic's workshop to order a car part when he received a life-changing phone call from his Gold Coast-based manager, Shane Monopoli.

"When I saw it was Shane, I didn't think it was a big deal, because he calls me all the time," says James, 18.

"But his voice sounded different this time. He said 'mate, I have some news to tell you, but you can't tell anyone about it'.

"I said 'come on Shane, cut to the chase; just tell me'.

"He made me promise again not to tell anyone then said 'mate, you've got the Elton John tour'.

"I was speechless. I was so blown away that I was grinning from ear to ear."

In fact, the teenager was so surprised by the news, he forgot why he was at the mechanic.

"I stumbled around for a bit," he admits.

"It was such big news and I wanted to tell everyone – including my mechanic, because I'm good friends with him – but I couldn't. It was very frustrating."

Once the deal had been officially sealed, one of the first people James told was his father, Fahri.

"When I told him he was blown away," says James.

"He said 'Elton's been knighted by the royal family – are you joking?'.

"He was rapt. My father is a very proud parent."

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Elton John chose James as his support act after listening to songs from the Australian singer's latest album.

"We got an email back from Elton's manager that said 'we think Eran is amazing; we think he will fit the bill and we'd love to have him on board'," says James.

The teenager admits things 'have gone a bit mad' since the news was made public.

His profile has received a major boost – and the timing could not be better.

The announcement coincided with the release of James's new album, *10 Songs About Love*.

"It's perfect timing," he says.

"To have this news come along and have the album come out is awesome."

James recorded the album in New York last year with producers Jay Newland (Norah Jones, Missy Higgins) and Tom Nichols (Celine Dion, Britney Spears).

It was a difficult time for the singer, whose mother, Wendy, died from cancer just one month before he left for the US.

"Everything had been planned for my New York trip. Obviously, I grieved with my family," says James.

"I knew she was going to pass away, but didn't know how I would continue on.

"But my mum always told me that I would continue on, that life keeps going – so that's exactly what I did.

"My mum didn't want me to stop and I really think recording the album in the States with those massive producers kept me going.

"I was doing something I loved at the same time I was grieving.

"I still feel her. She's gone physically, but she's there spiritually."

Eran's love affair with music began as a



Elton John hand-picked Eran James to support him on his Aussie tour



Eran James is thrilled to have been chosen to support Elton John on his Australian tour

child. He grew up listening to a wide range of artists, including Elton John.

"I can definitely say I'm an Elton fan," he says.

"As a kid, I sang around the house and sang for my family and I'd do the same thing when we visited my relatives."

At the age of 10, James was 'discovered' by music producer Shane Monopoli, who heard him sing at a talent quest at a Melbourne shopping centre.

"It was like seeing the birth of a young Stevie Wonder," says Monopoli, who became James's manager.

James travelled to the Gold Coast to record songs at Monopoli's studio, at Paradise Point, and eventually signed a recording contract with Universal Music.

During a chance encounter in the US, James met the Godfather of Soul, the late James Brown, who described the young Aussie's voice as 'blacker' than his own.

James says he would have liked the opportunity to perform with Brown, but there are other artists he hopes to share the stage with in the future.

"I think performing with Amy

Winehouse would be cool. Besides being a train wreck – she lives her life all over the shop – I really think she's a great singer and songwriter," he says.

For now, James is eagerly anticipating his tour with Elton John.

And if the opportunity arises for him to sing a duet with The Rocket Man, that will be even better.

"To sing with him would spin me out for sure," says James.

"I feel very lucky and privileged to be sharing the stage with him.

"This tour is going to be amazing."

Monopoli, who will travel with James on the tour, is equally excited.

"Elton is one of those guys who when he believes in an artist, anything is possible," he says.

"(Former Newcastle singer) Catherine Britt is a great example – we're hoping that it will be the same for Eran."

► **Elton John and Eran James play Elysian Fields, at Canungra, on November 25 at 6pm. Tickets are \$199 to \$399.**