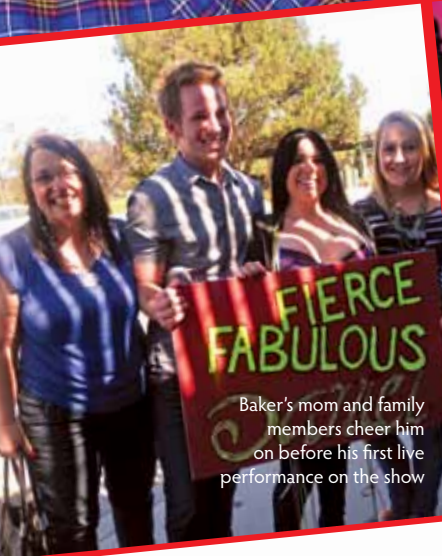
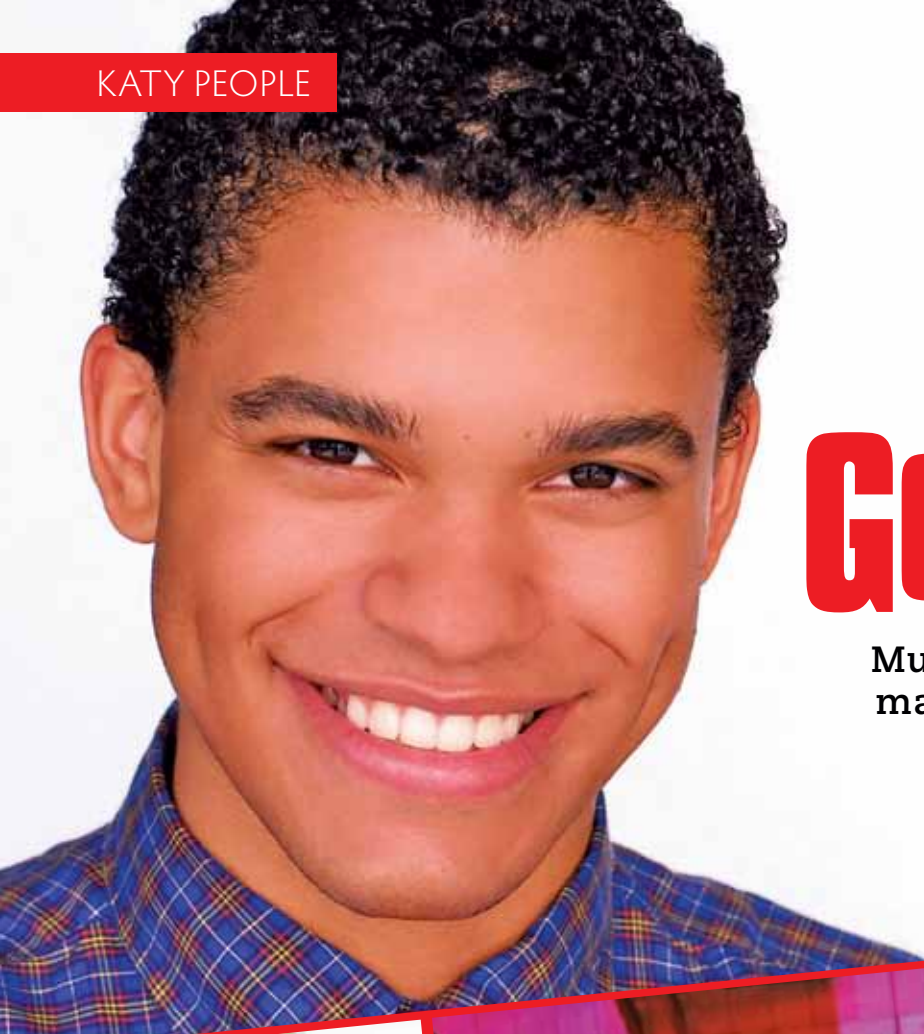


Daniel Joseph Baker competed on season six of America's Got Talent, making it all the way to the semifinal round

# Katy's Got Talent

Musician Daniel Joseph Baker makes a name for himself on America's Got Talent

*Written by Rebecca Rose*



Baker's mom and family members cheer him on before his first live performance on the show

Performing for fans on South Padre Island



Baker speaks out against bullying as part of the national No H8 campaign



photo by Adam Bouska

Katy residents got a big surprise recently when a hometown singer became an overnight sensation, thanks to one of the country's most popular TV shows. Daniel Joseph Baker made it all the way to the semifinal round on season six of NBC's long-running hit show, *America's Got Talent*. Now, he is busy making a name for himself in the music industry, performing at shows across the nation.

## Capturing the Country's Heart

*America's Got Talent* features amateur performers from all walks of life vying for the top prize of \$1 million. Throughout

his time competing on the show, Baker gave three memorable, over-the-top performances, coming up just short of a spot in the finals. For the 20-year-old aspiring superstar, who has made no secret of the challenges he has faced as a victim of school bullying, his newfound fame has only served to motivate him both as a performer and now as a role model for youngsters everywhere.

## An Early Love of Music

In 2006, Baker settled with his parents Ron and Eilene and older sister Jennifer in Katy, where they still live. Homeschooled for the last two years of high school, Baker went on to attend Houston Community College before enrolling at the University of Houston to study political science. He was born and spent much of his early years

in Lacey, WA and has also lived in California and Utah. "I've been able to meet some of the kindest people," says Baker of his life in Katy. "It felt so good to share the hometown glory with this wonderful city on *America's Got Talent*." Baker says music found him at an early age and he credits his mother as his original inspiration. Now, his heart lies with performing. "The bigger the audience, the more I perform, the better thrill I get from the audience's positive energy," says Baker.

Growing up, the vocalist had a natural love for choir and drama, but says people who know him from his wild performances would probably be surprised to learn how much he loves to read. "Sit me down with a good book, and I won't leave my room for 24 hours," he says.

### Taking a Chance on His Talent

Even though he has always loved to perform and sing, Baker calls the idea to audition for *America's Got Talent* a "fluke" that grew out of a desire to change the direction his life was headed in. In his debut for the judge's panel, Baker performed his own unique version of Lady Gaga's hit song "Bad Romance."

In Las Vegas, Baker sang another Lady Gaga number, "Speechless," which nabbed him a spot in the coveted quarterfinal rounds. While the cameras captured the raw energy of his fiery performances on stage, Baker says the audition process was grueling and tense. He shares that the week of auditions in Las Vegas was one of the most stressful times in his life. "On TV, they portray Vegas week as very drama-filled and intense, and in person, it's even worse," explains Baker. "Every day was so stressful. I would get back to my hotel room each night after filming and cry to my mom, because of how stressed out and tired I was."

For his semifinals performance, Baker sat atop a rotating piano for a stirring performance of Adele's "Turning Tables." He was considered by many show experts to be a shoo-in for the finals, but in a shocking elimination, he was sent packing before the finale. But rather than feeling defeated, Baker says the show has injected new life into his drive to become a pop star. "The show gave me a confidence that I could never have gotten from anywhere else," he says.

### Speaking out About Bullying

It's not the first time the young singer has had to face down a daunting challenge. Baker has been deeply honest about the relentless bullying he faced as a child and young adult, singled out for being different from others his age. He says the effects still haunt him to this day, even in relationships with people closest to him. "My bullying has affected me very personally," shares Baker. "But honestly, it has only made my performing stronger and made me want to work harder."

Baker believes the solution to ending bullying is to encourage the community to reach out and work together. It's important that parents who suspect their child may be the bully take action. "Talk to your child about why being kind to others is key in life," encourages Baker. "Bullying is a terrible thing, and we all need to do our part." When Baker spoke out on TV about being a victim of bullying, it earned him the support of viewers and new fans, many of who reached out to the young singer to share similar experiences. His Facebook fan page is filled with wall messages from admirers from across the country, leaving words of adulation and support.

### Motivated by His Fans

Nowadays, what motivates the young performer most are those same dedicated fans. Baker says their devotion is deeply touching, and he constantly strives to live up to his newly earned role-model status. "Before them, I never thought I could do what I wanted," he says. "They make me so strong."

As for what will come next, the budding pop star doesn't mince words. "I want to be a fierce pop star," says Baker. "Before, when I would say this, I thought I was crazy. Now when I say this, I know it's only a matter of time." KM

*REBECCA ROSE enjoys freelance writing and sharing the many inspirational stories of her Katy friends.*

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