

The Oxford Choral Songs

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The story of our School Song is one with links across the world. The words of 'Here in this House', that so strongly reflect MLC School's ideals of bequeathing to future generations a place of beauty, truth and kindness, have also been cherished by other institutions who likewise were inspired by its message.

JOHN MASEFIELD'S POEM

In 1932 MLC School was directly honoured by John Masefield (1878–1967), the Poet Laureate from 1930 to 1967, who gave permission for the School to use the poem he had written for his daughter Judith's school, Saint Felix School in Southwold, England.

MUSIC COMPOSED BY LINDLEY EVANS

We were fortunate to have Lindley Evans at MLC School at the time we received permission to use Masefield's poem. Lindley Evans, as well as teaching Music at the School in the 1930s and 1940s, was also the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's 'Mr Melody Man' on children's radio, President of the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney, and regular accompanist of operatic soprano Dame Nellie Melba.

WORDS THAT INSPIRE

MLC School is not the only school to choose Masefield's words to celebrate their school in song. Because the words were written for Saint Felix School, they were the first school to use the poem for their school song. They, however, chose to title the song 'Beauty'. In 1932 MLC School adopted the opening phrase 'Here in this House' as our song's title. The music for Saint Felix's school song, which is still used today, was composed by Henrietta (Etta) Maria Addis, a student at Saint Felix School from 1920 to 1924.

Last year we were contacted by Heather Simms, an Old Girl of the Sutton Coldfield Grammar School for Girls, UK who told us that for fifty years, from the early 1930s to

the early 1980s, they had also used the John Masefield poem for their school song. Their version had music composed in 1929 by a Mathematics and Music teacher, and perhaps influenced by Saint Felix School, they had also titled the song 'Beauty'.

Upon hearing a recording of the MLC School Song, Heather wrote: 'I think you win the prize for the best tune! Our music master used to complain about our tune when he was trying to teach it to us'. She added that Fran D'Alcorn, Saint Felix School's former Headmistress and Chair of the 'Old Felicians', had said that the Saint Felix school song 'is almost impossible to sing as it constantly changes from 3/4 to 4/4 time'.

Further research revealed that two other schools in the UK (Mayfield School in East Sussex and the Godolphin and Latymer School in Hammersmith, London) had for a time used the John Masefield poem for their school songs, and that Northfleet School for Girls in Kent had used the poem as their school poem for many decades.

INTO A CALM WHERE BEAUTY NEVER ENDS

A school song should both celebrate the institution for which it was written and be able to unify past, present and future students. John Masefield's words perfectly capture the essence of MLC School by uniting the spirit of Old Girls, current students, and the 'long generations' who will come after us with a desire to bestow a place of truth and kindness for 'the souls of other unseen friends'.

'We shall not see them, but we can endow
This place with beauty for them here and now.'

Early MLC School songs

Prior to the adoption of 'Here in this House' in 1932 as the official MLC School Song, the girls sang two school songs; one official and one unofficial; to celebrate MLC School.

In 1915 the girls, longing for a song to sing at sporting matches and other such occasions, composed one themselves which they titled 'The Song of the Burwood Collegian' which was sung to the tune of 'Riding Down from Bangor' (a song written sometime around 1871). Although this song was not granted official recognition, the 1976 Old Girls' Union publication *Links Across the Years* says that it 'enlivened many unofficial occasions'.

The June 1926 issue of *Excelsior* opens with an announcement that an official School Song had been written by Lois Carter (Prefect and Dux that year) and set to 'swinging music' composed by her mother. *Excelsior* was in raptures at the announcement of an official School Song: '... the feeling that we so long to express, our joy in belonging closely to each other through the best School of all – M.L.C. – the School that ever exhorts us to be 'Lucis filliae'.

Here's for our College days! M.L.C.

Daughters of the best School, each one we!

Here's for the Shield and the Cross and the Star

Known by us, loved by us, near or far!

And whether it's greylight, starlight, sunlight –

Ever our hearts be filled with one light,

Cheerful, brimful, merriest, funlight, Daughters of Light.

Images left: Lindley Evans CMG (1895–1982). Photo circa mid-1930s. Scan from cover of Lindley Evans' autobiography held in the MLC School Archives. Lois Carter (1926). Photo from *Excelsior*, May 1927.