

# Dorothea Mackellar hears music

*Another year's crop of fertile minds at the Dorothea MacKellar Poetry Awards*



She loved the sunburnt country around Gunnedah and again this year the north-western New South Wales town played host to the National Dorothea Mackellar Poetry awards, which celebrate and encourage poetry in schools.

Poems are written to a different theme each year. This year's was *I Hear Music* and the standard of submissions drawn from primary and secondary schools nationwide was again very high.

Winners were flown to Gunnedah to be presented with their prizes where young Australian composer Chloe Charody – recently returned from Amsterdam where her commissioned work *Magdalene* premiered at the Dutch National Ballet – was guest performer. She spoke of her career accompanied by her music.

"The presentation ceremony was a wonderful event, it was a big logistical challenge to get it running and the culmination of a whole year's work," says project officer Mila Stone.

Of the Primary competition, judge Dr Robert Kimber said, "*I Hear Music* has given us poems which are quite different. Many of them have been lyrics because *I Hear Music* has given great focus to the senses, especially hearing and consequently listening.

The Upper Primary section for Years 4–6 students (including Year 7 in Qld and WA) attracted 4300 entries with the winning poem *The Dressage Day* submitted by Lily Hartwell, 11, of St Mary's Star of the Sea Primary School, Milton, NSW.

The youngest winner was seven-year-old Jack Ford from Shore (Sydney Church of England Grammar) School, in Sydney's Northbridge who wrote *Forever Young* about his great grandmother to win the Lower Primary (K-3) section.

"This is a fine poem – well sustained – consistent in form, showing a sensitive use of language. The rhyming is well devised... Jack's

**Senior Secondary Winner**  
**Jacqueline Krynda – Merewether High School, Broadmeadow NSW**

*Excerpt*

*The old clubhouse  
sits  
at the end of the lake  
elbows on its knees  
(peeling white through light blue)  
contemplating the water  
sloshing around its ankles.  
Inside  
the best place  
is in the corner,  
on an up-turned milk crate.  
Above, stairs murmur as footsteps climb them  
(up and down).  
Water runs under salty timber,  
tangled wires  
hang down to rest.  
Warm air finds its way in  
amongst all the odd shapes.*

response to the memory of his grandmother is rich in detail and deep in its love for her. The poignancy in the grandfather returning after the war to find her "sitting alone" is a gem of expression for what it implies... This is a mature work," Dr Kimber commented.

Judge of the Secondary competition Joanne Horniman said, "I was delighted by the quality of the poems submitted. Many were linked to the theme of music either directly or indirectly, but there was a range of subject matter. Often poems on worthy subjects were let down by a lack of awareness of the possibilities of poetry; the best ones showed that even a small, apparently insignificant subject could move the reader with new insights. I was often surprised by an original way of using words, or of looking at

**Junior Secondary Winner**  
**Beth Downing – Campbell High School, Campbell ACT**

*Excerpt*

*The singing moon, a roughly polished silver  
sickle  
Bursts out a melody  
Of all that once was  
And all that will be.  
It knows.*

*The stars resonate;  
Their chorus,  
Their stories, their sights of the day and night.*

*Crisp rainy air,  
It sets the stage,  
Prepares the black, smothering curtain of  
midnight:  
As if the light has all but been tapped from  
this world,  
Sucked down the drain.  
For another miracle, a new sight.*

something. I found humour, and an enormous amount of energy and life. Some poems won me over with their panache."

Sixteen-year-old Merewether High (NSW) student Jacqueline Krynda was Senior Secondary winner with her poem *The Sailing Club*.

The judge's comment; "This poem is rich in feeling, conveyed with a natural, beautiful rhythm, absolutely unforced, but which takes great skill to achieve. In a tone sometimes conversational, and with affectionate humour, it reminds us of the beauty in our daily lives, the wealth in association and community, the way old communal pleasures are under threat, and the inevitable passage of time, for both people and buildings, with great tenderness and insight.

“The elegiac final lines, alluding to the timeless mystery of the sea and things we cannot grasp, only makes the ordinary lives lived above, with their inevitable mortality, seem more precious.”

The Junior Secondary section was won by 12-year-old Beth Downing of Campbell High School (ACT).

In the Learning Assistance categories, Lachlan Bolton, 11, of the Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta (NSW) won the primary section with *The Ride of My Life* while Ben Kingston, 17, of Darling Point Special School, Manly (Qld) took out the secondary section with his poem *I Hear Music*.

The NSW Community Relations Commission prize was awarded to Benjamin Gibson, 14, of Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta (NSW).

The Redeemer Baptist School in Sydney's North Parramatta was also the winner of the \$1000 schools prize for the overall excellence of its entries.

The Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards is a unique national project, giving Australia's young people a voice and an opportunity to strive for excellence in literature.

The awards are conducted by the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society Inc, whose aim is to recognise the contribution Dorothea made to Australian literature and to ignite a spirit of patriotism among Australia's youth.

The poetry competition began on a local level in 1984, as part of the promotion campaign, and quickly grew to state-wide level, becoming a national project a few years later. Winning submissions receive a cash prize of up to \$500 and a trophy, all entrants receive a certificate.

Work on next year's competition begins immediately after the awards ceremony with the committee meeting soon to determine the theme.

*Excerpt*

**Lower Primary Winner**  
**Jack Ford – Sydney Church of England Grammar School, Northbridge NSW**

*My great grandma rocks in her rickety chair,  
Smiling, at me, through her matted grey hair.  
“I can hear music, in all that you say.  
I can see laughter, just watching you play.”*

*We hear the locusts and magpies cry,  
The wind rustles the leaves, beneath the dark sky.  
“I will never feel alone, in my old age.  
My soul is still young, like a bird in a cage.”*

*Stripey, her cat, slinks up to her seat,  
Stretching out on the rug, under her feet.*

*Excerpt*

**Learning Assistance Secondary Winner Ben Kingston – Darling Point Special School, Manly Qld**

*When I am in my world I can hear music*

*I hear it at night  
I hear it in people's noises  
I hear it in the places I go each day.  
When I talk to people I hear music  
When I sleep I hear music  
Music is my constant companion.  
My life is ruled by the music in my head.*

*Music is my friend but also my enemy  
When you can't stop the music it becomes an obsession*

*I can hear the music now  
Playing, playing.  
Over and over in my head.  
Like the waves continually lapping the sand  
and then getting louder and louder as they crash.*

*Excerpt*

**Upper Primary Winner**  
**Lily Hatwell – St Mary's Star of the Sea Primary School, Milton NSW**

*Beep! Beep! Beep!.... “Ah the alarm” I think to myself  
As I glance at the blinking numerals on the tiny white shelf  
Then I remember the dressage day, it's on today.  
Mum flings the door wide and exclaims:  
“I'll help you get ready, you've got a big day!*

*And before I know it, I am in the car,  
Happily munching on a muesli bar  
I hear the horse float, rattling behind  
Knowing my pony is safely inside  
We bounce over bumps, but they don't bother me  
It's dark. I can barely make out the shapes of the trees.*

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