In the beginning ...

In 1996, Star of the Sea’s fledgling choir, comprised of around thirty students, was named. It was decided that Stacella had a nice ring to it – Star and a cappella were joined together to form one word, Stacella. This choir would grow to become part of the rich fabric of the performing arts faculty at the College.

The founder of the choir, Peter Faulkner, commenced teaching at Star in 1990 having been appointed as a humanities teacher by Sister Josepha in her last year as principal. Sister Josepha was a passionate advocate for the performing arts. She loved to perform on and off the stage and was an inspiration to many.

At this time in Melbourne, a strong a cappella movement emerged which manifested itself in many workshops, concerts and festivals being held each year. People love to sing and here was an opportunity for the trained and untrained singer to come together periodically to learn new repertoire and to enjoy each other’s company without the need for instruments, detailed musical scores or costly sound equipment. Songs were largely taught orally by inspiring artists and teachers like Tony Backhouse, Rachel Hore, Melanie Shenahan and others.

One evening Peter Faulkner was mesmerised by a concert given in Melbourne by a group of four young women singers in an a cappella group called Arramaieda. These women had style, presence and tremendous musicianship and sang with both heart and soul. Perhaps a similar group could be formed at Star? There was certainly no shortage of talent at the school.

Several songs written and/or arranged by Rachel and Melanie from Arramieda have been recorded and performed by Stacella: The Sea, Walk With Me and Fly Bird. Rachel Hore, in a nice twist of fate, was contracted by Larissa Cairns in 2012 to run singing workshops in Fiji when Stacella visited in December of that year for its biannual trip. Rachel made such an impression on the members of the touring group that she was contracted again to take workshops at Rotorua in New Zealand on the 2014 tour. Singers on that trip are indebted to her for introducing the group to some beautiful pieces that have now become part of Stacella’s core material.

Principal of Star, Rosalie Jones (1991-2005): a key Stacella patron ...

In 1991, Rosalie Jones succeeded Sr Josepha Dunlop as the first lay principal of the College. Rosalie had a firm belief in the importance of music, dance and drama as essential ingredients in the balanced education of the young. Rosalie, like Sr Josepha as principal, was a “big picture” person who gave consistent encouragement to staff and students to show initiative and leadership in all areas of school life.

The Stacella room in the Patricia Carroll Auditorium is dedicated to Rosalie for her role in the development of the choir and to the wonderful support she gave to Peter Faulkner - and later to Larissa Cairns - as Stacella Coordinator. Rosalie would often rave about the performances of the singers which encouraged all concerned with the choir to keep forging ahead as new challenges were met. She gave the tick of approval to Stacella as a name and entity, to the annual concerts, to raising money through different types of corporate, community and family sponsorship, to a cappella group classes, to the production of various Stacella CDs and to the biannual trip to New Zealand and Fiji. Without her continual patronage in her time as principal, Stacella would never have seen the light of day.

June 2015
Peter Faulkner – founder of Stacella …

In 1993, Rosalie offered Peter part-time work as a Producer/Director of the Junior Musical Production at Star for Year 7 and Year 8 students. Peter stayed at home to care for his second child, Ben, after the first nine months of his life so this was work mainly undertaken on the weekends. He joined forces with the very dynamic drama teacher, Eileen Dalley, to co-produce and direct four productions in the 1992-1995 period including Germs, Lollies, Man of Steel and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. These productions were supported by numerous College staff and were warmly received by audiences. They were an important vehicle that gave junior students an opportunity to participate in the joys of a school musical because, at that time, they were not eligible to be involved in the annual College musical production.

Peter asked if he could keep some of the very talented cast of Joseph after the 1994 Junior Musical in a group singing class which would come out of timetabled normal classes once a week. Rosalie embraced the idea. In so doing, she gave the green light to Stacella’s development as an important institution within the College from 1994 onwards. Starting with only one class, the number would increase to over one hundred students from Year 7 to Year 10 taking these group singing lessons each week. These singing classes were unique to Star then and they are still unique.

Within a year of the first singing lessons in 1994, a choir had been formed. In 1996, the first Stacella concert took place in Eymard Temby Hall.

Stacella philosophy …

Singing is fun.
Singing should be challenging and interesting.
Singing is food for the soul.
Singing builds self-confidence and self-esteem.
Singing develops harmony.
We believe that the human voice is the best instrument of all.

Key elements that underpin Stacella …

- Regular group singing classes and choir rehearsals

Students who want to be part of the program are required to undertake group singing lessons once a week (a cappella classes). These classes would be undertaken during normal timetabled lessons, similar to the system operating for instrumental and individual singing lessons with trained music teachers. These classes were only offered to Year 9 and Year 10 students in the early years of Stacella. Later they would be extended to Year 7 and Year 8 students. Year 11 and Year 12 students would have an hour-and-a-half rehearsal after school once a week but no group classes. Sometimes specialist choirs are formed, too, for choristers who wish to extend their commitment and skills and have the time and energy to rehearse and perform more regularly. Stacella Singers is such an ensemble.

June 2015
• Singing *a cappella* is to be encouraged

In the early years, at least half of the songs were sung *a cappella*, mainly because *Stacella* didn’t have an accompanist to help with rehearsals. In many ways, singing without musical accompaniment requires much more skill from the singer, a way to improve the overall singing capabilities of each singer. Students would have to learn to listen carefully to one another in order to maintain pitch as they could not rely on musical prompts from an instrument like a piano.

• Shared student leadership

In the early years, and to a lesser extent later on, senior students were encouraged to undertake conducting, accompaniment, compering and other types of leadership and administrative type roles. The first *Stacella* leader, Shikkiah de Quadros Wander (1996-1997) was particularly important in developing this shared leadership mentality as she was a very fine musician herself. Shikkiah was College Captain and Dux in 1997.

• Featuring iconic songs from around the world

Global music was heavily featured in the repertoire and iconic songs from many were learnt and performed in the language and style of the country from which they had come. While popular songs would be included in the repertoire from time to time, they usually had something to say about the human condition and would not be just a bit of light-weight entertainment. Iconic songs from Ireland, from the Maori culture in New Zealand, from the tribes of South Africa, from the USA and the Afro-American tradition were major features. Significant Australian pieces were included too.

• Aiming for the sound of a mixed voice choir

The middle and bottom registers of the female voice were to be developed so that the tribal pieces the choir sang could be performed with more authenticity. In many school choirs, the sopranos can overpower the other parts. In *Stacella*, the warm resonant tones and sounds of the altos would feature heavily.

• Singing should be fun for all concerned

It should be uplifting and inclusive. It should also move students out of their “comfort zone” from time to time. In 1999, Grace Bronowska wrote a poem as a Year 9 student expressing what *Stacella* meant to her. The sentiments she expressed sums up beautifully what singing with *Stacella* was meant to be like. Hopefully hundreds of former and current students will be able to relate to such sentiments. Grace was elected *Stacella* Captain in 2002.

**OUR STACELLA**...

ENCOURAGEMENT is what we need  
FUN is what we have  
WORKING TOGETHER is what we do  
AN EXAMPLE is what we set  
ACCEPTED is what we feel  
SINGING is what we love  
A GROWING CHOIR is what we are

June 2015
Other Ingredients for Success

- The biannual trip overseas: New Zealand and Fiji

In 1998, thirty-two Year 10 and Year 11 students and five teachers ventured to New Zealand for a ten-day tour of the “land of the long white cloud”. This trip was set up as a reward for these girls for the loyalty they had shown to the choir. It was partly funded through generous donations from Stacella sponsors and donors.

While there were several low key performances arranged for the group, the objective was to sing when and where the choristers wanted: in the street, on the inter-Islander ferry service, before and after meals, on the waters off Picton while paddling our kayaks, in the refreshing waters at Hanmer Springs, on the bus or during church services.

On the eight trips to New Zealand, the same places have been visited: Christchurch, Picton, Wellington, Napier, Rotorua and on two trips to Auckland. Visiting these places specifically gives the traveller a taste of the cultural and scenic diversity that is on offer in this beautiful country so close to Melbourne. Out stay at the Tunohopae Maori Marae in Rotorua on several of these trips was certainly a highlight amongst many. The Stacella group witnessed first-hand the passion, commitment and exuberance shown by the Maori people for their music and their culture.

In 2012 a trip to Fiji broke the sequence of trips to New Zealand. A significant feature of this trip, arranged by Larissa Cairns, was the singing workshops conducted by Rachel Hore as mentioned previously. Rachel taught the group several new songs which have become part of the core Stacella material and all were a cappella in nature. Rachel used her significant leadership and musicianship skills to quickly assemble a repertoire that was to entertain local community groups and villagers towards the end of the nine-day tour. This tour was different in nature from the New Zealand tours because the group did not move around the country very much, staying for the most part at the Daku Resort. The experience of sampling the authentic Fijian life was an unforgettable experience for all concerned.

- Annual Stacella Concert

Since 1996, each August or September, Stacella members have performed in concert. These concerts showcase what the singers have been rehearsing and performing over the course of the year. They are designed with the audience in mind as the choristers endeavor to entertain and present an eclectic range of material to engage, amuse, uplift and provide a musical feast for the audience.

More than twenty songs are usually performed: some from the older Stacella repertoire, some new pieces in the tradition of Stacella and occasionally pieces that are very different. On several occasions, these concerts have coincided with the release of the newest Stacella CD.

Concerts have been staged in various venues over the years which have included Eymard Temby Hall and Sebastian Hall at Star. On four occasions, Stacella has performed at The National Theatre in St Kilda and at Xavier College.

June 2015
HISTORY OF STACELLA AT STAR OF THE SEA COLLEGE, BRIGHTON

- 20th Stacella reunion in 2015

In 2015, the 20th Stacella reunion concert will be presented at the Patricia Caroll Auditorium on Friday, 11 September and Saturday, 12 September at 7.30pm.

- Stacella CDs

Stacella produced its first CD in 1998. It has recorded more than 150 songs over the past twenty years.

- Let it Shine -1998
- Flying Free – 2000
- Still Shining - 2002
- Changamano - 2004
- Majesty -2006
- Tapestry - 2010

The beauty of these CDs is that they are both a wonderful reflection and sample of the material that has been sung by Stacella over the years. They are also an excellent resource for new members to appreciate and from which to learn. Many former Stacella choristers and staff still play these CDs to their children.

Stacella leadership: 1996-2015

- Peter Faulkner 1996 -2004

Peter has a long history of performance. He started as a folk singer in the late 1960s in Shepparton at the Quiet Village coffee lounge. He became involved in school musicals early on in his career. He was the lead singer for a function band, performed as a piano man or guitarist and singer at various restaurants and function centres.

Peter spent nearly ten years performing with the biggest classical choir in Melbourne in the 1990s, The Melbourne Chorale. This experience helped him gain confidence as a conductor and chorister himself. He was able to use some of those skills to good effect in his work with Stacella. He also directed and co-directed several musicals over the years in several different schools.

- Larissa Cairns 2005 -2014

Larissa was appointed to a position of music teacher at Star in 2003 and has been an integral part of Stacella’s history ever since. She is a qualified music teacher, has a beautiful soprano voice and has had a wealth of experience as a leader of church choirs, as a solo performer and as a member of various music ensembles over the years. Her creative and managerial talents have been a real asset to the choir’s development.

Peter took leave for a year in 2005 and was keen to transfer the leadership of Stacella to someone who had the ability and motivation to take the next step in its development. Larissa, with her experience in a more classical style, focused a little more on the upper register of the voice. She moved slightly away from the a cappella approach and moved more towards a popular type of repertoire with the use of piano and, on
occasions, a Stacella band to embellish performances. She was given tremendous support in this by several fine music teachers including Gavin Cassidy, Melissa Calia, Sarah Calia and Mina amongst others. Larissa kept virtually all of the elements in place that had contributed to Stacella’s initial success in the first decade of its existence. She also added a few other initiatives to embellish the program. In 2014, Larissa took parental leave and is currently a very loving and proud mother to Gilbert.

- Tenille Kearney 2014 -

Star of the Sea College was fortunate to have someone of Tenille’s enthusiasm and talents to take over from Larissa as the third Stacella leader in twenty years. Tenille is a trained music teacher like Larissa and in April 2014, started her stint as the new leader. As a vibrant young woman, Tenille has her own ideas about music and performance and took on the leadership of choir with enthusiasm and a real sense of responsibility. She is committed to ensuring that Stacella stays true to its roots but forges ahead sometimes along different paths to those previously travelled. After the New Zealand tour in 2014, she has a much clearer idea of the structure, philosophy and history of Stacella. She has the energy and drive to keep the organisation bubbling along as before but with a slightly different emphasis.

Other key staff in Stacella’s development

Over the years, several key musicians have supported the Stacella coordinators in their quest to maintain the highest quality choral singing at Star.

These include former Stacella singers Natarsha Hodgson, Melissa Calia and Amelia McCullogh and Lisa Sully (nee Faulkner) who was Music Captain at Star in 1994. Gavin Cassidy was in charge of the Year 12s in the early 2000s when he first came to the school. He has been an ongoing supporter of Stacella since then.

There have been numerous staff at the College who have given this organisation tremendous support over the years. The current administration, as with former administrations, has given Stacella enormous support. This organisation is indebted to them along with those parents who have entrusted their girls to the leaders of the choir for two decades. The greatest gratitude, however, is saved for those singers who have done their very best to enliven, inspire and embellish the performing arts at Star of the Sea since 1996.