

## Philip Edselius – Prefect (Arts & Culture)

### Keynote Speech 2026

As my role as Arts and Culture Prefect suggests, I love music – I believe it connects us, inspires us, and I think it is the truest form of emotional expression. It allows us to feel in ways we didn't even know we could, but none of us listens to the exact same music.

Good morning Mr Featherson, Dr Swann, Ms White, Mr Angus, my dad, staff and boys.

This morning, I wanted to talk about how music has changed my life and how, through music, I have learned about myself and about the world. I've chosen some of my favourite songs and want to share with you today what they have taught me.

I'll start with a classic from Billy Joel, *Piano Man*. I performed this song for the Year 12 cohort on Big Fella, and I think that it creates a really personal environment. This song shows us that everyone has a story, regardless of how they may appear.

John at the bar is an outwardly very happy person who is '*quick with a joke, or to light up your smoke*'; however, he says, '*Bill, I believe this is killing me*'. The point is, the guy who is always happy outwardly may be internally struggling or need someone to be there for them. Don't take John for granted; ask your mate how he's going.

Paul is a real estate novelist who never had time for a wife, the waitress is practising politics and the businessmen, the old man, the manager, Davy in the navy – they all have rich internal lives that add so much potential interest.

When I look out here today there's a sea of blazers, but how great is it to know that everyone has an individual story – just starting to be written. So much depth underneath the crest we wear and it's so important to take time to hear one another – be the piano man and sing us your song.

Which leads me to my second favourite also by Billy Joel, *Vienna*. The song starts '*slow down, you crazy child*', and it reminds me to take a breath and pause. When I feel overwhelmed, and those who know me know that's not unusual, this song reminds me to relax and just exist within myself. To take a moment to be with myself and then I can put things into perspective and not to rush.

The song says, '*You're so ambitious for a juvenile*'. Every boy in this room has his entire life in front of him, we have so much time to think about what we will do. I think that while yes, I should study hard, practise, and train for my future, it is also important to me to live in the moment.

This is important to me as I imagine it is for the rest of my year level, as today is the last March 25th we will ever spend at Brighton Grammar as students.

Which brings me to my third song, *Viva La Vida*. The story is all about the way that things can be amazing for a time, but then stuff happens, and you may realise you are standing '*upon pillars of salt and sand*', but you love life anyway. That despite the stress and despair at times, it is a powerful, awesome world.

I'd also like to talk about not the words, but the famous introduction. It's hard to explain but there is something that is genuinely uplifting about those violins and cellos and all the strings playing those notes. It reminds me to be optimistic. While the song itself is sad, the lyrics are about the despair of a ruler who has lost his kingdom. The chorus of hearing the Roman cavalry choirs singing tells me that things can, and will, go wrong, but you should love life for what it is, a beautiful thing.

And finally I want to talk about *Father and Son* by Cat Stevens. This is an oldie, your parents will know it, but even that is special, as music can connect us through the generations. This song means a lot to me because it's about a father talking about his son, and throughout the song you can feel the love the father feels – how much he wants him to be happy, how much he cares and how much he knows, but most importantly, his respect and love.

And I think it's important for us to reflect on how much our fathers love us – they might joke around and tell us off occasionally but underpinning it all is this great need to protect us and guide us and even when the son leaves, he is still there supporting and understanding.

The song isn't about the argument between the two, it is about the father knowing this is the time to let his son go, and how despite him physically leaving, the father will always be present for the son, no matter the distance. I know I will move out one day, but no matter what, my Dad is someone who will stay with me for the rest of my life. The song is a reminder to me that my dad is pretty cool, and cares about me a whole lot, and [Swedish] *Jag Elskar dig Pappa* (= I love you Dad).

These songs are my favourites, yours will be different and the guy next to you will have another set, but we all need to find our own songs, our own stories, our own ways to find joy. So go out and sing your song at the top of your lungs.

Thank you.