



Elizabeth

from
Cambridge Sunrise
to
Italy



(PICTURE) “Bella Ciao” is an Italian song that conveys messages of community and togetherness, which I feel are some of the core values of youth exchange. “Bella Ciao” is an important song in Italian culture, both now and in the past. It is an Italian folk protest song

that became a symbol of resistance against oppression. The song's origins can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th century, with the first variations being sung by women labourers in rice fields. However, the song gained global recognition as it became the anthem of the Italian partisans during the second world war, who bravely fought against fascist forces and the Nazi occupation. The lyrics tell of a partisan who leaves their loved ones behind to go and fight for freedom. Over time, the song has gone beyond its historical roots to become a universal anthem for freedom and hope. It has been adopted by movements worldwide that advocate for human rights, democracy, and social justice, which are the core values of Rotary.

Youth exchange is a modern connection to the song through its travel, cultural immersion, and collaboration. While it is not a matter of life or death, students do leave their homes, saying goodbye to their comfort zones, and start on a transformative journey. In a foreign environment, students may face challenges such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and homesickness. These are battles of their own kind. Through these challenges, students gain adaptability, empathy, and a broader perspective on the world.

Youth exchange creates and fosters deep friendships and a shared sense of mission, across national and ideological boundaries. The collective spirit found in “Bella Ciao” reflects the camaraderie found in international youth communities. Our experiences teach us that change, whether global or personal, often begins with unity.

As RYE comes to a close, another kind of “Ciao” is said. This time it’s to our new friends and family we made abroad. Saying goodbye to a powerful shared experience that will forever change and impact us. This farewell is bittersweet. It signifies the end of something special, but also the beginning of applying everything we learned to the wider world and to our lives back home. The end of the exchange leaves behind something lasting: the memories, the insights, and a seed planted in us for future action and growth. Saying goodbye to the friends I’ve made here in Italy reminds me of my theatre experiences in Canada; sharing an intense and rewarding experience knowing it will come to a close. The promise to keep in touch and the hope, however faint, to see each other again in the future.

“Bella Ciao” is more than just a song; it’s a spirit of bravery, renewal, and transformation. In ways, a youth exchange is a peaceful, yet powerful, act of resistance. Resistance against ignorance, division, and fear. It requires us to leave what we know behind, facing and overcoming challenges, and returning home changed.

By echoing the themes present in the song “Bella Ciao”, we recognize that even in modern, peaceful exchanges there are still reflections of enduring challenges, and within them, the hope for a more united and hopeful world.

Ciao one last time, and thank you,

-Elizabeth

Link to “Bella Ciao”: <https://youtu.be/4CI3lhyNKfo>