

# Return of musical migrant

by MARTINE BORRACK

IT'S no small feat launching a successful career on the live music scene.

But if you're passionate enough, all obstacles are surmountable. Just ask Braybrook's Vladimir Kocibelli.

Returning to the Brunswick Music Festival, where he launched his career five years ago, the Albanian-born violinist warmly recalls the electric moment his first Australian audience begged for more.

"It was surprising," says the unassuming Kocibelli, who is classically trained.

"I saw how the Australian audience applauded me. The people said 'more and more'. I was to play for 25 minutes, but I played for 45."

The moment was more poignant than any other in what had already been an illustrious musical career spanning 20 years with the Albanian State Opera and Ballet Orchestra.

Back then, as a refugee in Australia without legal status or a mastery of the English language, the audience's response instantly affirmed his risky and painful decision to leave Albania – ahead of his family – in search of political and creative freedom.

"The Brunswick Music Festival is my life and my career," says Kocibelli, acknowledging his gratitude to festival director John McAuslan.

Reunited with his wife and three children only three years ago, Kocibelli now performs with his guitarist son, Herris, double bass player David Abuso and percussionist Paul Sarcich.

Well-established on Melbourne's multicultural music scene, Kocibelli and his band have played at a variety of venues and festivals, from Moomba to the Melbourne Arts Centre and town hall.



**Gypsy feeling:** Vladimir Kocibelli draws audiences like a magnet.

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Their original sound has taken them further afield with the inclusion of their music on the soundtrack of recent cult film *Head On*, exploring Melbourne's young, gay and Greek community.

As a musical force, the band's strength rests on a versatile repertoire of traditional Albanian music, Romanian and Hungarian gypsy tunes combined with classical, Italian and Greek styles.

Kocibelli says he is fascinated by all these styles because he and his band are drawn to "music with feeling".

"This gypsy music is with feeling," Kocibelli says.

"The difference is just the tune, the

melody, but all types of gypsy music have the same feeling.

"When I play it I like to put myself inside the music, not just to imitate it."

Making his third appearance at the Brunswick Music Festival, this year Kocibelli will play a mixture of Albanian music with Hungarian and Romanian gypsy styles.

"For me it's important because in Australia it's multicultural and when I play I like to play something for everyone. It's very important for the music to take the audience like a magnet," he says.

Vladimir Kocibelli and his band are playing at the Brunswick Music Festival's opening street party on Sunday.

They will perform on the Albert St stage from 5.15pm to 6.05pm.