

It's music to their ears

Years and miles separated them and their music, but violinist Vladamir Kocibelli and his son Herris are together again. Martine Borrack reports.

VLADAMIR Kocibelli came to Australia seeking residency in 1991, leaving his wife Lida and three sons behind in Albania.

It wasn't until September last year that the family was reunited.

His eldest son, 19-year-old Herra, a violinist and guitarist, says those five years left him without a teacher and mentor.

"I started learning violin when I was four years old, with my father. He taught me until 1991 when I was 14. For five years I was without a teacher."

Mr Kocibelli was the first violinist with the Albanian State Opera Orchestra for 20 years before fleeing his country.

When father and son were reunited in Australia last September, Mr Kocibelli recalled that his son's playing had neither improved nor progressed since they parted.

"It was a bad time for me, but I wouldn't say I lost my attraction to music," said Herra who played his first solo recital in Australia at the Footscray Community Arts Centre three weeks ago. "I'm catching up now. I'm winning."

When he left Albania, Mr Kocibelli believed he would receive permanent residency within six months to a year, enabling him to sponsor his family's arrival in Australia.

"I thought I must go to Australia which was a multicultural community," he said.

"In my country they had problems with politics. It wasn't a problem for my music, but for 43 years I heard politics, politics, politics."

"If you listen every day to politics you can't think music."

"I don't like or understand politics. For me it is easier to talk music," Mr Kocibelli said.



Together again: Separated for five years, Vladamir Kocibelli (foreground) and his son Herra are making music together again.

Mr Rantos invited Mr Kocibelli to a concert at the Melbourne Town Hall, later introducing him to the manager of the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra.

Within three weeks of their meeting, he was invited to join.

"At this moment I felt very good," Mr Kocibelli said.

"This was the first contact with music life here in Australia."

Mr Kocibelli said he played with the orchestra without pay for two years.

Happy with life in Australia, he believes his family is lucky to be here.

"I say to them if you have brains you must do wonderful things in this country," he says.

Herra, the oldest of Mr Kocibelli's three sons, says music is his life and wants to study it at university next year.

He is again receiving tutelage from his father and plays guitar as the fourth member of his father's band with double bass player David Abuso and percussionist Paul Sarchich.

Vladamir Kocibelli's Gypsy Feeling Band will play a series of performances at Southgate shopping centre on May 10 from 1.30pm as part of "Cultures in a Blend", a month-long festival of music, dance and song.

They will play at Aerostato in Elizabeth St, Melbourne on May 25 at 4pm.

But the musician who left his country to pursue his passion was repeatedly refused residency in Australia until 1995 when he was accepted under a new category for migrants with artistic qualifications.

By then he had established himself on the classical and world music scenes in Melbourne.

He accepted invitations to join the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra, the Malvern Symphony Orchestra and perform his own Albanian and gypsy tunes at the 1994 Brunswick Festival.

He also plays with the Orana and Geelong chamber orchestras.

His gypsy tunes were so well received by audiences that his band, *Vladimir Kocibelli's Gypsy Feeling Band*, was invited last year to perform at a reception for Senior Citizens week hosted by Governor McGarvie at Government House.

He also gave a performance at the 50th anniversary of the United Nations at Melbourne University.

"It was very hard for me to start a music life in Australia because it's a big coun-

try and I didn't know the level of music here," Mr Kocibelli said.

"I didn't play my violin for two years because I didn't have permission to work so I started by going around listening to many orchestras."

It was after a concert at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1994 that Mr Kocibelli met and befriended one of the college's music teachers, Spiros Rantos.

"I met him and explained my situation. I said can you please find me a job, but I don't like money."