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By LIBBY LESTER

WHEN Vladimir Kocibelli considers the merits of various countries, he concentrates on their sounds. Greece is a good country, he says. Just noisy. Albania, too, is filled with unwanted sounds. But he says Australia is a big country of gentle tones, a good country for a musician.


Kocibelli, 48, migrated here from Albania in 1991. A violinist who had spent 20 years with Albania's state orchestra, he did not leave because of communism; rather, it was the change from communism to something unknown. "All my life, I had listened to politics," he says. "I thought, enough. No more. I must go."

He left his wife and three sons, now teenagers, in Albania. It would take five years for them to join him. "It was a hard decision," he says. "But I did not make it alone. So many were leaving."

He could not play for money for two years while he waited for permanent

residency, so he joined various amateur orchestras and bands that performed everything but Albanian music. Once his residency was through, he began to accept professional offers.

His first was to play at the opening of the 1994 Brunswick Music Festival. "What will I play?" he asked the organiser. "Just Albanian music," he was told. With misgivings, he played two sets, after which the audience called for more. "I thought there must be many more Albanians in Australia than I realised," he says. "But no, the audience was not filled with Albanians."

Now, with his band Gypsy Feeling, Kocibelli performs a mix of Albanian, Greek and Eastern European music and has become a fixture in Melbourne's world music scene. "I play gypsy music with feeling," he says. "I play Hungarian music with feeling. I play Albanian music with feeling. The rhythm may differ ... but the feeling is always the same." 

## Extraordinary people

Vladimir Kocibelli

Picture: MICHAEL RAYNER

