

The sweet tears of an Albanian exile

By Nikki Protyniak

VLADIMIR Kocibelli stands in the living room of his neat Braybrook home with a violin cradled tenderly under his chin.

The Albanian expatriate lifts the bow in one hand and gently sweeps it across the strings. A mournful melody starts up, the notes hanging like tear drops in the darkened room. It's as if the violin is crying with Mr Kocibelli as he recalls the five years spent alone in a strange country.

Suddenly, the violin comes alive. The sad notes are replaced with a whirling tune that makes you want to tap your feet. Mr Kocibelli, a master of his music, has just caught sight of his wife, Lida.

The couple and their three sons - Heris, 19, and 14-year-old twins Elian and Igli - had an emotional reunion last week. It was the first time the family have been together since Mr Kocibelli migrated to Australia five years ago.

Happiness

"I am very, very happy," Mr Kocibelli said, dropping his violin to hug his wife. "We are a family again."

Mr Kocibelli first came to Australia in 1987 to visit an uncle. "He sent me the ticket and 10 days after that he died," Mr Kocibelli recalled. "I stayed here for three months and knew I had to come back one day."

"I left Albania again in 1991 and thought 'I must go to Australia'. When Albania was a communist country, it had problems. Now

starts the democracy and they have many more problems. In this country, in my opinion, the community is free."

The violinist, who spent 20 years playing with the Albanian State Opera, is now very much at home in the City of Maribyrnong. His decision to move to Melbourne's West was prompted after flicking through a copy of the Yellow Pages.

"One day I thought 'what can I do for this country?'," Mr Kocibelli said. "I opened the Yellow Pages and saw the community arts

centre in Footscray and so I ring. I found many musicians there. It is like my home now."

Mr Kocibelli, 48, was six years old when he first heard the violin. "Near my house was a reception place and many musicians were there," he said. "I saw one man play the violin and I thought 'how can this instrument have that nice sound'."

His parents sent the youngster to Albania's only music school and Mr Kocibelli was hooked.

He would practise six or seven hours a day

until his tiny hands were covered in blisters.

"After a while your fingers get tough and you don't feel it so much," Mr Kocibelli said.

Feeling the music is important in your head and your heart, not your hands, he added.

Because Mr Kocibelli plays so many different styles of music, such as gypsy, Russian, bluegrass and Rumanian, getting the feel "right" is even more important. You must play with feeling, to bring the gypsy feel to

the people, when you play gypsy music," Mr Kocibelli said. "I'm not gypsy but when people hear me play, they ask me 'are you gypsy?'. Then I know the feeling is there."

The same is true for every other style of music this music man plays. He has wowed audiences while playing with the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra, the Lira Symphony Orchestra, the Orana Chamber Orchestra, the Geelong Chamber Orchestra and other local bands. He has appeared with his vio-

lin on television stations SBS and ABC and has recorded several solo albums.

"For me, all music is beautiful," Mr Kocibelli said. "All my life is music. I don't know how to do anything different. Even if my hands fall off, I can't stop."

Mr Kocibelli will play with his band at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, 45 Moreland St, this Sunday (October 3) at 3pm. Tickets cost \$8 adults or \$3 concession. Inquiries: phone 9689 5677.

