

A master's bequest to young musicians

John Curro has been sought-after worldwide but teaching the Queensland Youth Orchestras has been his life's passion writes Chris Herden

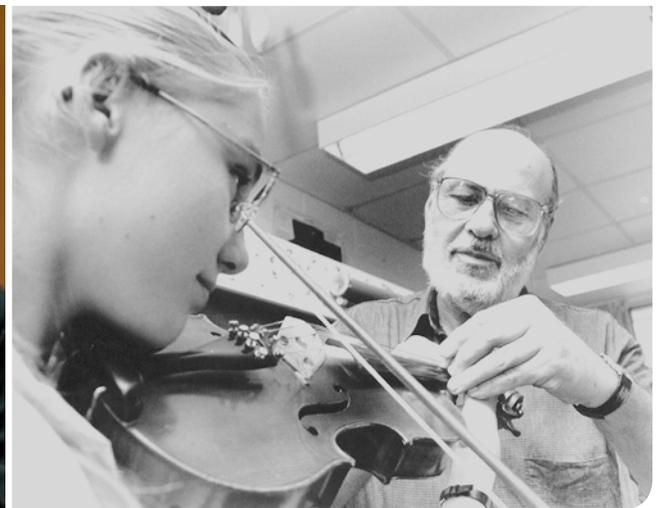
Even at 82 years-of-age John Curro's love for teaching remains unabated. As I arrive to interview the patriarch of the Queensland Youth Orchestras at his New Farm home, the master is giving one of his young viola-playing apprentices a dressing down about the need to "practise, practise, practise." He softens the blow with a gift of his wife Carmel's pikelets. "You can't survive in this business on talent alone," he says to the grateful student.

YOU SHOULD HEAR THEM NOW... THEY SOUND LIKE THE BERLIN PHILHARMONIC!

John Curro is the founder and musical director for Queensland Youth Orchestras (QYO), a training ground for professional musicians for nearly half a century. Around 480 young musicians aged between eight and 25 are players in the organisation's three symphony orchestras (which includes the exceptional Queensland Youth Symphony), two wind and brass groups, a junior strings ensemble and a big band.

Curro's skills as a musical director and inspirational leader, along with his personal philanthropy, have cemented QYO's positioning as one of the most successful and enduring institutions on the nation's cultural landscape.

"We've been on 12 international tours comprising of nearly 70 concerts and three



times we participated in the International Festival of Youth Orchestras. On the third occasion we were the invited host orchestra - no other Australian youth orchestra has ever been offered that," Curro says proudly.

John Curro's vision, commitment and love of music is a lasting legacy, one that stands tall in the classical music community and is acknowledged with honorary doctorates and his appointment as a Member of the British Empire and a Member of the Order of Australia.

In 1966 Curro was the head of strings at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music when Padua College Kedron requested he assemble an orchestra of young players to contribute a short segment at a City Hall music festival.

"I auditioned 86 players, the standard was terrible, it was hilarious really." Curro has kept a recording of that performance to occasionally remind him how much has been achieved over the decades. "At the end of it I said thank you children and good luck and a small group of them said 'please sir, we'd like to keep the orchestra going,' and so that's what we did. And wow... you should hear them now."

He hands me a CD recording of the Queensland Youth Symphony accompanying Queensland's leading diva Marilyn Richardson. "They sound like the Berlin Philharmonic!"

In 1976 Curro founded the National Youth Concerto Competition, now recognised as

the nation's most prestigious competition for string soloists up to 17 years.

Curro has conducted many of Australia's finest orchestras and has had guest conductor engagements with distinguished international ensembles including the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra and the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra. However, the QYO and teaching remain his lifeblood.

"The QYO teaches kids teamwork, responsible ethics, and about making sacrifices for each other."

During the 1980s he refused an offer of a principal conductorship from overseas so that he could continue his fine work with the QYO.

"By then the orchestra was sounding really good," he says.

"I feel better, I sleep better, get around better. All aspects of my life are now so much better."
 - Mike

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