

Robert Masters FRAM at 95

English-born violinist, Robert Masters, will celebrate his 95th birthday on 16 March in Sydney where he is now resident.

A gifted musician, Robert studied at the Royal Academy of Music from the age of 16 and rose to the position of Professor of Violin in 1947, aged just 30. He was made a Fellow of the Academy in 1952.



He formed the Robert Masters Piano Quartet in 1939, and during the next 25 years travelled extensively, including world tours in 1950 and 1956. During the latter tour in Australia, he met his future wife, Noel, who was then the Manager of the Musica Viva organisation in the state of Victoria. Returning to England, Robert added to a busy schedule by becoming Leader of the London Mozart Players. Included among his most memorable performances in the 1950s is playing with other distinguished colleagues in Westminster Abbey at Queen Elizabeth's Coronation.

A keen observer of the career path followed by the legendary Yehudi Menuhin, Robert recognised by the late 1950s that what Menuhin needed most was a grouping of exceptional musicians to accompany him on recordings, on concert tours, and in festivals. Yehudi greeted the proposal with typical enthusiasm, and by mid 1958 Robert had brought together the players - all drawn from the foremost chamber music ensembles including the Aeolian and Allegri Quartets - for their first concerts at the Festival Hall and recording sessions in the studios of EMI. Whilst Robert concentrated on his responsibilities as Concert Master, Noel managed the logistics of the ensemble and its tours. It became known over the next 20 years as the Bath Festival Orchestra and the Menuhin Festival Orchestra. A highlight for Robert and the musicians was the invitation to play with Menuhin in Buckingham Palace for the 21st birthday of Prince Charles in November 1969. As well as undertaking three world tours between 1970 and 1975, the Orchestra gave concerts throughout Europe and the USA, and made a host of highly-regarded recordings.

In 1963, Robert and Noel helped Menuhin establish his famous School in Surrey. Robert taught there for 18 years and was Director of Music from 1969 until his retirement in 1981. Today, the School caters for 75 students and provides instruction across the range of stringed instruments. During a recent visit to the campus, Robert and Noel were delighted to note what they both described as the incredibly high standard of performance from the young musicians.

Robert established the Menuhin International Violin Competition in 1983. This biennial contest — held originally in Folkestone, but today hosted by various countries — is regarded as the most prestigious event of its kind. Robert has been invited as the guest of honour during the 2012 concours to be held during April in Beijing.

As mentor, Robert's sage advice is much valued as he remains in close touch with musicians and with the various organisations he has directed over the years.