

Article rank | 12 Jan 2013 | The Dominion Post | SELINA POWELL

Kiwi hits high notes with his bows

MICHAEL DUFF has gone from conducting experiments to handcrafting musical instruments, and now his violin bows are the top prize at an international music competition.

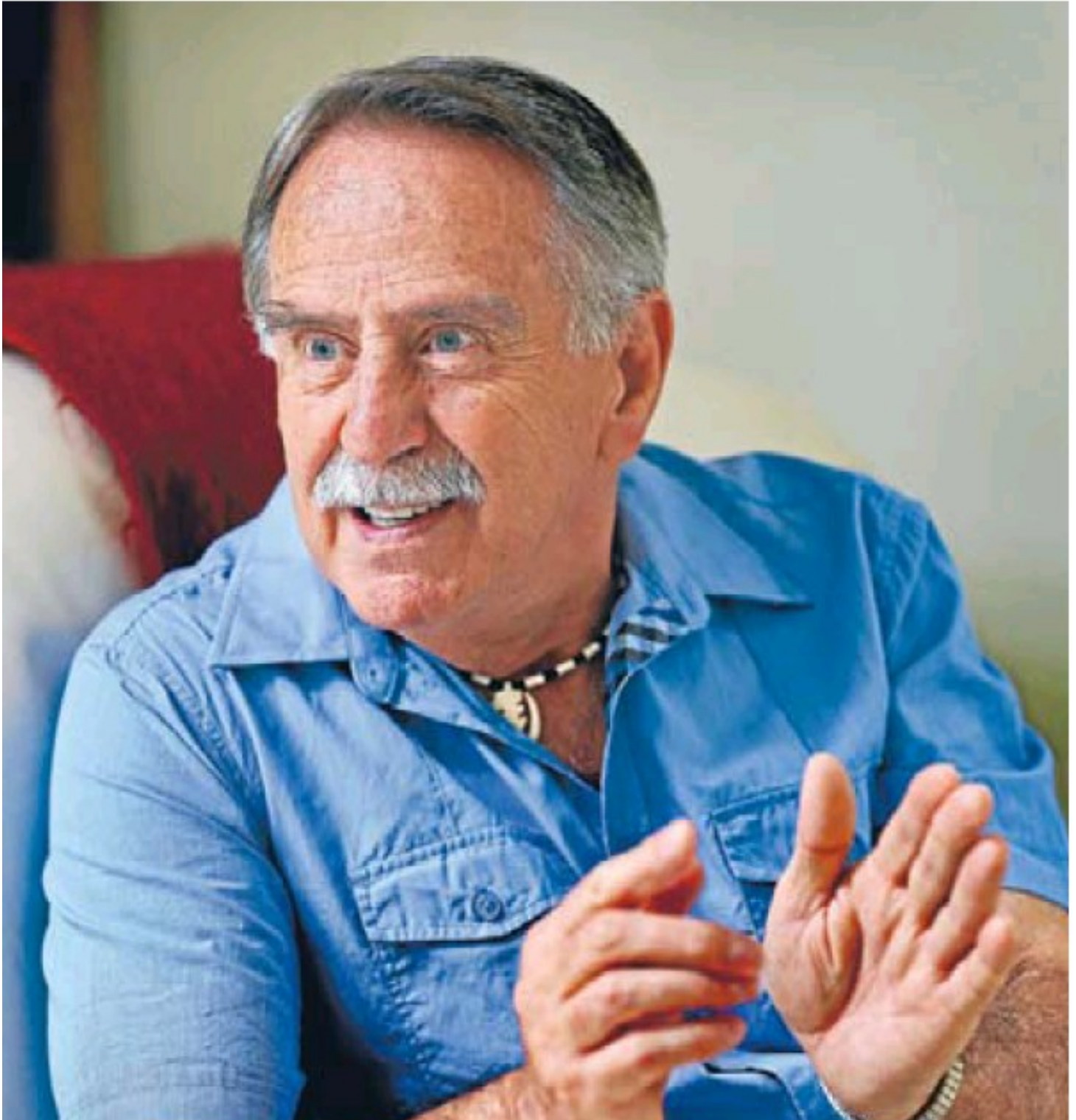




Photo: PHIL REID/FAIRFAX NZ

Clever Kiwi: Michael Duff's violin bows are in demand.

The former Wellingtonian's bows sell for between NZ\$2988 and \$9563 at his US store, and have been awarded as prizes at the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis.

Mr Duff played the piano during his childhood in Wellington, but only began to play the violin at the age of 23.

"I wanted to play the violin but my mother didn't like it . . . she didn't like the screeching."

After completing a degree in microbiology and biochemistry at the University of Otago, Mr Duff applied for a lecturing job in Bloomington, Indiana.

"I was strategising to get to Indiana University because my hero on the violin, Ruggiero Ricci, was a faculty member there."

Several other musicians, including cellist Janos Starker and violinist Josef Gingold, were also at Indiana University at the time.

"I was right next door to where the great musicians were."

Mr Duff learnt how to repair bows from a Danish violin maker who owned a shop in Bloomington.

He went on to establish Berg Bows in 1985 with former New Zealand Symphony Orchestra bass player Robert Berg.

The pair pioneered a new type performance-quality synthetic bow.

At Berg Bows' peak of production, the company produced 120 bows each year, with the cheapest selling for about \$600.

Now Mr Duff makes about 30 violin bows each year. His musical idol, Ruggiero Ricci, and former NZSO violinist Isidor Saslav are among those who have owned his bows.



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