

How 'naughty Michael' fiddled his way to success

MORE than 30 years ago, **Michael Masote** donned a municipal cleaner's navy-blue overall to sneak into the Johannesburg City Hall to watch the orchestra rehearse.

He had to disguise himself because blacks weren't allowed into the city hall then. But, says his wife, Sheila: "He was a naughty guy, and he enjoyed it."

It was not only the subterfuge Michael enjoyed. It was the music, a fascination sparked by a schoolboy visit to a Yehudi Menuhin concert in 1956.

Later, when Michael's father picked up an old violin bow in Sophiatown, Michael recognised it as "part of what that man was using in the orchestra". And he became even more intrigued.

So he took violin lessons with Professor Alan Solomon and, once he'd mastered the techniques, set about teaching anyone who was interested. He's still teaching and runs violin classes in Meadowlands, Soweto.

A talented young cellist has emerged from one of SA's politically eminent families and will soon be going overseas on a scholarship. **GILLIAN ANSTEY** reports on how his determined father made it possible

"His dream is to see a children's orchestra in Soweto," says his wife.

The results of his dedication can be seen in the Soweto String Quartet (three of them his nephews), the Soweto Symphony Orchestra which he started in the 70s, Diepkloof's African Youth Ensemble — and in his son, Kutlwano.

In June, the 21-year-old Wits music student will attend master classes at Menuhin's academy in Switzerland, and will return next year for full-time studies.

"I've noticed a lot of white kids start studying music but their interest falls off along the way," says Kutlwano. "For me, it's been easy. It's in the family. My father started me on the violin when I was five."

Kutlwano's musical heritage also extends to his mother's family. Sheila's late father, Zeph Mothopeng, president of the Pan Africanist Congress from 1984 to 1990, was not only a politician.

He started the Johannesburg Black Music Festival, based in Eloff Street, where youngsters learnt ballet, music, drama and art.

His widow, Urbania, now aged 78, still runs The Nineteen Girls' Choir in Orlando West.

"We are cultural politicians," says Sheila, an accomplished contralto with the Ionian Music Association.

"We don't say 'kill the farmer'," says Sheila, "we say ..."

"Kill the conductor," butts in Kutlwano.

But the lively youth is certainly serious about his music. A contestant for the recent Jim Joel scholarship, the largest classical music prize in the country, he has already performed in Scotland, France, Germany, Switzerland and Japan.

"It is rare for a black person to play classical music," admits Kutlwano.

"When I was at school in Soweto and Mmabatho, it would have been more acceptable to want to play for Orlando Pirates than for an orchestra.

"At St John's (the private school he attended in Std 9 and 10), everybody was surprised that a black guy could play a cello."

Kutlwano has the advantage of being born into a more amenable society than the one in which his father was told it would take a black half a century to play tunefully on a violin.

Or the times of repression during which his maternal grandmother, held in solitary confinement in Maritzburg, realised her husband was detained in

the next cell when she recognised a Mozart tune he was whistling.

"Sometimes, when I look at Kutlwano," says his mother, "and think where some of us come from ... my father was on Robben Island ... I was in detention for nine months ... my ballet career was nipped in the bud when they said white teachers couldn't teach us and we had no African teachers ... Kutlwano is a blessing."

More compliments come from Menuhin. Not only his letter which addresses Kutlwano as "my young colleague" but his remark after hearing Kutlwano play the cello.

"You've been well taught," said Menuhin.

During his visit to South Africa last month, Menuhin was reported as saying that the only real freedom "is being free to give".

His gift of a scholarship to the young Kutlwano is the second he has given to the Masote family, the first has spread musical roots throughout Soweto.