

MUSIC TO THEIR EARS

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart would beam proudly at the accomplishments of students from Sydney's Meriden, an Anglican school for girls, who have graduated from the program named after him. Their musical talents are shining across the globe.

Some have been accepted into the Royal College of Music in London, played with the Melbourne Symphony, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Opera Australia, or are studying at the San Francisco Conservatorium of Music where they have done masterclasses with the globally renowned pianist Yuja Wang.

The Amadeus Program, which was established at Meriden more than 10 years ago, provides opportunities for young musicians to participate in advanced ensembles, chamber groups and solo performances.

They are led by teachers who bring experience from orchestras and ensembles from around Australia and the world.

Jodie Spooner-Ryan, Meriden's director of music, says the program offers support and care for high-level performers who take masterclasses, enter competitions or perform outside the school, and who have often already gained music diplomas.

"Girls audition and provide details regarding their music achievements outside of school," she says. "There are about 25 students from years 7 to 12 in the program at the moment who



SUITE SPOT

**MERIDEN'S
DIRECTOR OF
MUSIC, JODIE
SPOONER-RYAN,
CONDUCTS
THE SCHOOL
ORCHESTRA.**

meet regularly, perform in formal recitals and participate in masterclasses and workshops.

"The program is not just for their music, it also supports them in their academic work and with pastoral care. Teachers help them balance their academic studies with the hours of practice they put in each week, and to deal with any anxiety they might have about performing. Senior Amadeus students often also mentor the younger girls in these areas."

Spooner-Ryan says although music has a special magic, there's nothing magical about the girls' achievements. "It's hard work, discipline and hours of practice," she says. "There's no music gene; they work very hard

and are incredibly focused and passionate about their music and their instrument."

Melbourne's Caulfield Grammar – an independent, co-educational Anglican school – provides a program based on the Suzuki method of teaching stringed instruments.

Jason Leinkauf, the school's head of strings, says students are taught to play in the same way as they learn to speak. "All languages have a reference recording ... [children] hear language even in the womb," he says.

"Students will have a recording of all the pieces they will play, so they have a reference and learn by ear in the same way. They haven't learned to read when they're little, so we focus on posture, tone and intonation so they're not distracted by a piece of paper.

"They're not taught written music until they're ready. Just like in a language, where they gradually learn the alphabet, we gradually teach them to recognise certain notes."

Leinkauf says the program operates in both junior and secondary schools bringing far-reaching benefits. "Learning to play helps to develop neural patterns in the brain, and the dedication and social interaction with other students that is required develops individual character and confidence."

"As Dr Suzuki who created the method once said: 'Character first, ability second.'"

IAIN GILLESPIE