

## San Francisco Chronicle

### At 95, he plays the violin — and builds them, too



Remo del Tredici has a pencil-thin mustache and carries a violin case. At 95 years old, he still drives his car around San Francisco and interacts with effortless charm. Honestly, the guy could pass for a spry seventysomething.

According to del Tredici, his secret to happy longevity has four vital components: twice-weekly golf games, regular music lessons, participation in an orchestra, and “a brandy Manhattan cocktail every day before dinner time for 50 years. Just one. No more than one.”

Born just outside of Pisa, Italy, del Tredici arrived in San Francisco via Ellis Island when he was 2 years old. The Richmond District resident enjoyed a lively city childhood; married his late wife, Gina; had a couple of kids; and spent his career as an auto mechanic. When he retired, the naturally curious del

Tredici figured it would be a good idea to stay busy. Eventually stumbling upon the violin he gave up as a child, del Tredici decided to give music another shot.

“I was terrible,” del Tredici said 20 years later, sitting in a classroom at the Community Music Center’s Mission District branch. He then picked up his violin and played us a few songs. Remo del Tredici is no longer terrible at the violin.

Founded in 1921, the nonprofit Community Music Center is almost as old as del Tredici and remains the source of two of his secrets for longevity: music lessons and playing in an orchestra. Once he began violin classes at CMC in 1996, del Tredici was hooked. “The music just got back to me. I really started to like it.”

### **A mechanic’s mind**

Del Tredici not only found a renewed love for music at CMC, he found a place in its chamber orchestra. But the great-grandfather of three didn’t stop there. Del Tredici doubled down on his new passion for the violin and learned to build the instrument himself. He remembers thinking, “Gee whiz, I wonder if I can make one ... because I am pretty handy.”

A mechanic’s mind is a good match for the precision of musical instrument making. Del Tredici is still enthusiastic about every element of the process, from the selection of the wood to the horsehair of the bow. His leathery, arthritic hands proudly turned the violin over as he explained all of its components, dropping in pertinent historical facts when the inspiration struck.

In his home workshop, del Tredici has built hundreds of violins. Many of them he humbly, almost casually presents as gifts. But del Tredici donates most of his violins to the San Francisco Unified School District and AmVets, an organization for military veterans based in San Francisco.

“My violins are great for beginners and intermediate persons,” del Tredici said. “You build them for tone, you see.”

Tregar Otton is del Tredici’s violin instructor at CMC. He joined us in the CMC classroom, beaming as del Tredici performed. Although separated in age by generations, the two musicians have an obvious bond.

“It’s a real pleasure teaching older students,” said Otton. “There’s no bull— whatsoever. Everything is really honest and straightforward.”

### **Students from 2 to 95**

CMC’s Communications Director Sonia Caltvedt is pretty sure del Tredici is their oldest student. Their youngest is a 2-year-old student in a family music lesson, a class in which kids along with parents or caregivers compose their own songs. “That’s my favorite class to peek into,” confesses Caltvedt.

With branches in the Mission and Richmond districts, CMC serves about 2,400 students annually, teaching classes in 30 different instruments, as well as offering voice lessons. 19 percent of CMC’s students are over 65 years old, and the student body is pretty diverse — 44 percent are white, two-thirds receive financial aid, and anyone can come on over and practice with an instrument for \$5 an hour.

Back in the second-floor classroom of CMC’s Mission Victorian, del Tredici suddenly looked up from his violin, mid-song. “Oops, I goofed!”

At 95, del Tredici seems to know the real secret to a long life. He shrugged off his “goof,” picked up his violin and started over. Said del Tredici, “I’m so happy I did what I did later in life. It’s keeping me alive, I think.”

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/music/article/At-95-he-plays-the-violin-and-builds-them-6434591.php>