Article on *Maestro* by Maria Joseph

**Article by Maria Joseph**

**MAESTRO**

Peter Goldsworthy

**INTRODUCTION**

Peter Goldsworthy was born in Minlaton, South Australia, in 1951, and now lives in Adelaide. Like Paul Crabbe, Goldsworthy finished his schooling at Darwin High School. He graduated in Medicine from the University of Adelaide in 1974, and now devotes his time equally between being a doctor and writing poetry, short fiction and novels. Some of his other novels include *Honk If You are Jesus* (1992), *Wish* (1995), *Keep it Simple, Stupid* (1996) and *Three Dog Night* (2003). *Maestro* appeared at number 22 on the Australian Society of Authors’ list of the top 40 Australian books ever published.

**BRIEF SYNOPSIS**

*Maestro* is the story of Paul Crabbe, a teenager growing up in Darwin in the late 1960s, and his relationship with his difficult and mysterious piano teacher, Herr Eduard Keller, the ‘maestro’ of the title. The episodic structure of the novel covers ten formative years in Paul’s life, from 1967 when he is fifteen, to 1977 when he is twenty-five years old. As a teenager Paul believes he will be a great concert pianist. Keller, however, takes him back to basics in his lessons and slowly reveals to Paul what it means to be ‘great’. As the narrative proceeds, Paul learns more about Keller’s secretive past in Austria – he was a renowned musician, and his Jewish wife Mathilde and son Eric were murdered in the Nazi death camp, Auschwitz. Paul is torn between his classical music and his relationships with his peers including Rosie, his girlfriend, and the rock band *Rough Stuff*. Paul is on a journey to discover more about Keller and in the process learn more about himself. The novel concludes after Paul’s failed attempt at becoming a concert pianist. Keller dies and Paul finally, but perhaps not fully, understands his remarkable maestro.
BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Holocaust

It is important to understand the Holocaust in order to understand Eduard Keller. The word ‘Holocaust’ (or Shoah in Hebrew) means to ‘burn the whole’ and it refers to the systematised extermination of the Jews implemented by the Nazi Party under Adolf Hitler in the lead-up to, and during, World War II.

When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933 (he became Führer in 1934), he implemented a series of laws that persecuted the country’s Jews. These included the barring of Jews from government positions and denying them German citizenship. Non-Jewish people were forbidden from marrying Jews. Anti-Jewish propaganda was rife in the media and school system. There were violent attacks on Jewish shops, homes and synagogues. Jews were beaten regularly. Nazi ideology portrayed the Jews as racially inferior and they became scapegoats for the country’s economic problems. In 1941, Jews were forced to sew the Star of David onto their sleeves – a visual symbol of their identity and oppression.

Concentration camps were set up by the Nazis as early as 1933 to detain those groups vilified by the Nazi regime. These included gypsies, homosexuals, disabled people, Communists, Jews and others deemed to weaken the Aryan (‘pure’ German) blood line. The camps were often labour camps using the inmates as a slave workforce. The workers were identified by numbers tattooed on their bodies, something both Keller and Henisch have (p.111; p.137). The Nazis wanted to ‘cleanse’ Europe of its Jewish ‘pestilence’, and so came up with the ‘Final Solution’ to kill as many Jews as possible. The camps now became death factories where anyone unable to work was gassed and their bodies burnt in the crematoria. It is estimated that over 6 million Jews were killed this way during World War II.

Keller is a character who emerges from this historical and political context. Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in the Anschluss of 1938 (p.116). The changes are at first imperceptible and Keller misses the chance to remove his family to safety: ‘The Nazis arrived, and what was different? Ninety nine per cent of our lives remained the same’ (p.118). The regime’s remaining one per
cent is more sinister. Keller is vulnerable under the Nazi regime as he is married to a Jew, Mathilde, and his son Eric is therefore a ‘mischling’, a person of mixed race (p.118). While not a Jew himself, Keller’s marriage breaks Nazi racial laws. Keller decides that his best defence is to be as visible as possible and thus he even performs in front of Hitler (p.135).

Keller’s status as a renowned musician does not save Mathilde and Eric, who are taken to Auschwitz while Keller is in Berlin performing for Hitler and never seen again (p.136). Out of grief or ‘penance’ for his family, Keller sews the Star of David to his sleeve and is also taken to Auschwitz in 1942 (p.137). The last he is ever heard of is on the march to Bergen-Belsen (p.137). Many died on this march due to starvation, fatigue, disease and freezing temperatures. It is remarkable that Keller survived. This background also explains his drinking, his complicated personality, his self-harm (he chops off his own finger) and perhaps even his reasons for hiding away in Darwin.

Darwin

Darwin is presented as a city of immigrants and the novel contains characters from many backgrounds, including Europeans, Chinese and Indigenous Australians. Mr Crabbe first regards Darwin with suspicion as ‘A city of booze, blow, and blasphemy’ (p.9). Paul’s initial reaction is much more positive: ‘I loved the town of booze and blow at first sight’ (p.9). Later, Mr Crabbe learns to enjoy the city’s tropical climate as he creates a wonderful garden. In all this initial imagery of Darwin, Goldsworthy emphasises its fecundity and lushness. This connects with Paul’s burgeoning sexuality as he grows up and falls for Megan, then Rosie.

As a European exile, Keller is distinctly uncomfortable in the heat, evident in his florid, ‘sun-coarsened skin’ (p.3). Even though he has been there for much longer than Paul he looks out of place, as his old-fashioned white linen suit indicates. In this sense Darwin is emblematic of his exile. Indeed, the narrator states that Darwin is a place for fugitives: ‘A town populated by men who had run as far as they could flee’ (p.17). Keller seems far from home, both literally and metaphorically. He is on the run from the grief and guilt he feels after the events in Austria. When Cyclone Tracy hits Darwin in 1974 the image of Keller surviving by sheltering under his grand piano is symbolic of his powers of
survival, as well as another instance of suffering in his long life (p.128). Music has saved him and kept him going when he could so easily have wished to die.

**Adelaide**

By comparison, Adelaide is presented as a metropolis. Paul associates the city with enjoyable holiday activities such as ‘The Zoo’, ‘the Beach’ and ‘The Show’ (p.53). The Crabbes lived here prior to Darwin and their feelings are often nostalgic. Paul’s parents relive ‘past Gilbert and Sullivan triumphs’ in the Christmas holidays in the section ‘Intermezzo’ (p.53). As Paul grows more attached to Darwin the fondness for Adelaide is replaced by an image of it as drearily suburban: ‘Now I felt a Territorian’s contempt for Adelaide and its neat rows of suburbs’ (p.100). Adelaide is also associated with Paul’s maternal grandparents with whom he stays during the piano and band competitions. It is a city with none of the youth and vitality of Darwin. When Paul chooses to go to Adelaide to study law and music it is seen as fulfilling his parents’ wishes in many respects, based on their loss of hope of his ever having a career as a performer. Adelaide is presented as a rather safe and uninspired choice, suggesting the future blandness of his musical career.

**STRUCTURE, LANGUAGE & STYLE**

**First-person narration and self-reflection**

*Maestro* is a first-person narrative. Paul at twenty-five records his memories of Keller when he was instructed by him as a teenager. Looking back provides the narrative with a nostalgic tone, encapsulated in the novel’s final lines when Paul describes still loving his ‘foolish, innocent world’ of ‘delusion’ and ‘music’ (p.149). While the younger Paul can seem arrogant at times, the older Paul is more circumspect. He is often critical of his younger self: ‘Had he spruced up especially to meet me? I was child enough—self-centred enough—to think it likely’ (p.5). The older Paul comes to understand Keller better than before by considering the magnitude of Keller’s personal history in the Holocaust. Paul comments, ‘Sitting here, setting down these first memories of Keller … I find it
hard to understand how much I came to love the man, to depend on him’ (p.13). The older, wiser Paul shows us how he grows into a mature man via the mistakes and misunderstandings of his youth.

Time and place are significant in the episodic structure of *Maestro* as Paul reflects on his past and his current self. The novel begins in Darwin in 1967 after the Crabbes have moved from Adelaide. The next section, ‘Intermezzo’, covers the brief period of Christmas holidays spent at the grandparents’ in Adelaide when Paul and his mother investigate facts about Keller at the library. The text returns to Darwin in the next section covering 1968 when Paul gradually falls in love with Rosie and starts playing with the band, *Rough Stuff*.

The narrative shifts again to Adelaide to cover the music competitions Paul enters and his decision to attend university there. The following section, ‘1974’, traces Paul’s growing physical and emotional distance from Keller at the conservatorium in Adelaide as well as the effect of Cyclone Tracy on Keller and Darwin. ‘Vienna, 1975’ covers Paul’s failure to succeed as a pianist in Europe and his meeting with Henisch, who once knew Keller but denies he is still alive. ‘1977’ covers Keller’s death and the end of Paul’s hopes of greatness.

**Settings**

*Maestro* is predominantly set in Darwin. Paul also travels to Adelaide and Vienna. These three settings are contrasted with each other in order to create meaning and to connect with important themes in the text. Darwin is a town of exiles. It is a steamy, lush town that reflects Paul’s blooming sexuality. Adelaide is more sedate and conservative, and represents the more mundane side of Paul’s musical talent. Vienna is connected with European art and culture, and is also Keller’s birthplace. When Paul travels to Vienna he is on his own journey as a musician and on a quest to find out more about Keller, which suggests that the two quests are intertwined. From Keller’s point of view, Vienna’s surface of art and culture is undermined by its sinister history of Nazism and the persecution of the Jews.
CHARACTERS & RELATIONSHIPS

Paul and Keller

Paul lives in a world of ‘delusion’ and has ‘ridiculous dreams’ of being a concert pianist (p.149). While he has talent, by the novel’s end Paul realises that a career as a pianist is impossible. Much of Maestro is about Paul’s adolescent folly in his attitude to Keller. Full of pride, Paul is burning to show off his talent by playing. He feels patronised by Keller’s first lesson, which proceeds through the character of each finger, and challenges Keller over his statement that pianists can play without a little finger. Paul sees Keller’s missing right pinkie as a sign of his teacher’s lack of ability, but Keller tries to make him see that music is about interpretation and feeling, not technical agility. When Keller asks Paul to play The Children’s Bach, Paul’s arrogance means he is insulted, as he sees it as a piece too simple for him. Keller insists that Bach ‘is never easy’ and that the composer ‘finds something new in the most ordinary passage’ (p.28). When Paul hears Keller play for the first time he concludes that it is ‘The most beautiful music I’ve ever heard’ and Keller responds bluntly, ‘You cannot have heard much’ (p.74). Keller is trying to deepen Paul’s rather superficial understanding of music, by having him understand subtlety and nuance. This incident also says something of Keller’s character. Keller is filled with guilt and self-contempt over events in Austria. He sees only imperfection in everything he does. He sees nothing but futility in his meagre attempts at creating ‘art’.

Keller feels estranged in a new land and Paul also feels out of place when he first comes to Darwin – an outcast because of his interest in classical music. Only when he is older does Paul realise the truth that Keller taught him about life – that it is better to be honest: ‘A small hurt now to avoid a wasted life’ (p.113). When Paul travels to Europe in a hopeless search for fame he remembers Keller’s words: ‘Europe has nothing more than this to offer’, the ‘this’ meaning himself (p.113). Paul’s delusion includes Europe as a centre of classical music, but Keller’s point is that geography does not matter. The older Paul wishes he had heeded his teacher’s advice and had not wasted time in a
futile dream. Goldsworthy demonstrates that humility and respect, rather than arrogance and rebelliousness, would have helped Paul mature more quickly and saved him from foolish mistakes.

While Paul and Keller’s relationship is often characterised by brutal honesty and their prickly student/teacher association, the novel also traces their growing fondness for each other. While Paul is away in Adelaide he sends Keller a Christmas card; Keller responds by sending a signed first edition of a Czerny opus (p.54). The fact that the parcel is rather carelessly wrapped says something, perhaps, of Keller’s nonchalance about this rare possession, but more than that it indicates that he does not want Paul to read too much into it. Still, it remains a precious gift. Later in the novel Keller, who seems hardly ever to leave the public hotel the Swan, volunteers to travel with Paul to Adelaide to help him undertake a competition at the conservatorium. One could argue he is only interested in helping Paul as his student, but this rather selfless act seems fatherly. Indeed, Paul comes to replace Keller’s lost son, Eric. When Paul is about to leave to study in Adelaide, Keller, who is notoriously closed about his past, begins to reveal the secrets of his life to him.

Paul also sees Keller as a father figure. Paul’s own father lives vicariously through his son, wishing he could be a great pianist and be taught by Keller. The narrator dismisses Mr Crabbe and focuses on Keller as the person who provides unwanted advice and bears the brunt of Paul’s teenage rebelliousness. It takes longer for Paul to grow fond of Keller as his relationships with others distract him from Keller. It is the older Paul, however, who writes and records Keller’s life in a lasting memorial to him, like an extended obituary. At Keller’s hospital bedside Paul shows him all the love and affection of someone truly sorrowful at his impending death. Keller is otherwise alone, and Paul fills the role of the missing son by holding his hand and speaking to him in German. The younger Paul had accused Keller of being a ‘Nazi’, but for the first time as Keller is dying Paul says ‘Maestro’ with respect (p.144).
Paul and his peers

As well as his lessons and dreams of being a concert pianist, Paul’s life is filled with other relationships important in his growing up. While Paul never loses sight of his classical music, these relationships sometimes interfere with his relationships with Keller and his music. Paul is something of an outsider at Darwin High School as a newcomer and because he is interested in music that is not seen by his peers to be ‘cool’. Thus his only initial friend is Bennie, an English migrant who is also a little different in that his hobbies are playing the violin and collecting butterflies (p.23). Bennie’s friendship is rejected, however, when the school bullies, Reggie Lim, Scotty Mitchell and Jimmy Papas, invade Paul’s lunchtime sanctuary in the Music Room and Paul is able to help out their rock band by providing music and playing keyboard. For the first time Paul finds himself in the inner set and enjoys the respect the boys give his musicianship as well as the excitement of playing in a rock band on stage.

Paul is uncomfortable with the experience on many levels, however, stating that he is ‘unable to take it seriously’ (p.91). He sees this music as inferior to classical music and, despite their temporary success in the Battle of the Bands, knows Rough Stuff will never go anywhere. He also knows that it is taking time and attention away from his classical music training: ‘Nothing worthwhile was ever achieved so easily, a small voice—perhaps my father’s, perhaps Keller’s—nagged deeply inside’ (p.91). This experience does show that Paul is just as vulnerable as everyone else in wanting to belong.

Paul falls for Scotty’s girlfriend, Megan. It is clear this is lust or a purely physical attraction: ‘the furred nape of her neck, her smooth bare shoulders’ (p.32). Making love to Megan is a very unfulfilling experience though, as she is ‘too selfish’ (p.80), and Paul realises then that he really loves Rosie. Rosie is similarly an outsider – another newcomer at Darwin High interested in studying and classical music. With Rosie he finds that he does not have to be alone and that it is okay to be different. Their lasting relationship shows that he has not made a mistake in choosing her.
Paul’s relationship with Rosie is, however, a distraction from Keller. As he says: ‘I loved him, in many ways—but I loved Rosie more’ (p.117). As Paul departs to study in Adelaide Keller finally opens up about his past. Yet Paul’s mind is on the fact that Rosie is sitting downstairs in the car waiting to make love. The narrator, the older Paul, regrets this lack of empathy for the old teacher who is talking about things that are very painful: ‘I should have stayed, listened … But there wasn’t enough time. The aroused, sexual present overwhelmed the past’ (p.118). He also regrets the fact that he did not have another chance to ask Keller for further information about events in Vienna. While Rosie is by no means a negative influence in Paul’s life he does lament not realising the importance of what Keller tells him.

**THEMES, IDEAS & VALUES**

*Art and horror*

Vienna, prior to the rise of the Nazis, is imagined as a capital of art and culture in Europe. Vienna is the birthplace of the great musicians mentioned in the text: Mozart, Schubert and Haydn. The Crabbes echo a reverence for Vienna as the home of opera and architecture. Mrs Crabbe, for instance, declares that Vienna is her ‘favourite foreign city’, yet she has never actually been there (p.45). Keller dismisses this as a shallow and superficial understanding of the city because his experiences during the Nazi occupation have shown him a darker underside. Vienna, he says, has ‘Ornamental facades. Hiding the hypocrisy within’ (p.45). He talks of it as an ‘excellent city for military pomp and processions’, referring to the Nazi propaganda parades (p.45).

When Paul travels to Vienna himself he behaves like a tourist (p.133). The fact that Henisch no longer even thinks Keller lives highlights to the reader all that Keller has done in order to distance himself from Vienna and its evil connotations. The different views of the same city underscore the fact that Paul and the Crabbes can never fully comprehend Keller’s experiences. For Keller, Europe has been forever ruined by the barbarism that was really behind the false facade of ‘culture’.
Adolf Hitler, who grew up in Vienna, is similarly seen as emblematic of this horror. Hitler originally wished to be a painter. In this way Goldsworthy contrasts Keller’s career with Hitler’s and asks how a man who considered himself an artist could be capable of such atrocities. It is also no coincidence that Mathilde is a Wagner specialist, as Wagner was a composer whose work was seen by the Nazis to best represent their Aryan, or ‘Germanic’, racial ideals. Despite having a love of the same music as Hitler, Mathilde’s life is not spared, simply because she is Jewish. In this case art is incapable of overriding prejudice and hate. Keller’s ‘textbooks’, or his scrapbooks filled with newspaper articles, are his attempt to record the horrors of which people are capable. He wants Paul to see this so his eyes are opened to the evils that exist but his parents try to protect him from this revelation, viewing it as a macabre offering on Keller’s part. Overall Goldsworthy shows us, through Keller’s suffering, that we must be wary of the true nature of humanity underneath its veneer of beauty.

**Talent versus genius**

When Paul is contemplating his move to the conservatorium in Adelaide he asks Keller, ‘What is the difference between a great and a good pianist?’ Keller replies ‘Not much … Little bits’, pointing out that a concert pianist is ‘one in a million’ (p.113). Keller concedes that Paul is his ‘best student’ but that it could take many years to teach those ‘little bits’ and that it may be impossible. When he plays in competitions he attains only minor placings. While Keller does not place much stock in exams, the lack of firsts indicates Paul is deficient in something that will make him world-renowned.

When Henisch listens to Paul play at first he is attentive but then loses interest (p.139). Henisch declares Paul cannot have been taught by Keller because Keller’s students played with more ‘rubato’ or passion (p.139). This is a clue as to what Keller means by those ‘little bits’. Keller’s own playing demonstrates the passion and intensity, born of experience, which Paul lacks. While Paul’s technique is perfect, he lacks his teacher’s depth and feeling. When Paul hears Keller play he is overwhelmed. Keller’s Chopin lifts Paul onto his feet in exultation; he is ‘overcome, bursting inside with song’ (p.97).
There is the suggestion that much of Keller’s passion and genius comes from his suffering and experience. Indeed, Henisch defines Keller as ‘an artist who had suffered more than any man had a right to suffer’ (p.132). Paul first overhears Keller playing and singing Wagner, Mathilde’s music, and discerns a battle going on between Keller’s ‘head and heart’ in an expression of grief (p.73). Keller’s face is ‘tortured’ and ‘booze-ruined’ (p.74). Keller’s playing is sensual, ‘nearer to lovemaking than to music’ (p.74). While Paul’s sexuality is developing he does not yet have the experience or suffering in life that will give him Keller’s passion. It is debatable, however, whether or not any amount of suffering or experience would make Paul the equivalent of Keller, for Keller still possesses a greater genius than Paul ever will.

**Guilt and betrayal**

Paul and Keller have more in common than surface appearances would suggest. Their musical talent makes them different from the average person. The group theatrics of the Crabbes’ Gilbert and Sullivan performances do not attract them, for instance. Paul is an outsider at school spending his lunch hour in the Music Room, and Keller spends his life in isolation in his room at the Swan surrounded by his pianos. And both suffer from guilt at having betrayed friends and loved ones.

Keller’s guilt about the past and the fates of his son and wife is more intense. His drinking and isolation at the farthest corner of the world away from Vienna where no one can possibly know him are signs of his self-condemnation. While he is not directly responsible for the events in Europe, we sense that he wishes he had had the foresight to remove his family from Vienna before the danger. He also resents entertaining the enemy, and that playing for Hitler and Eichmann did not save Mathilde and Eric. Keller hates himself for surviving Auschwitz and his self-loathing is evident when he cuts off part of his finger. His experience in the Holocaust makes it difficult for him to enjoy music.

Paul’s guilt and his acts of betrayal are less extreme. He betrays his friend Bennie by letting the *Rough Stuff* boys know it was Bennie who clogged up the muffler on their panel van (p.84). At this stage of his life Paul is clamouring to be part of the in-crowd at school; to be accepted requires denouncing Bennie as his friend. He also betrays Rosie by sleeping with Megan. He realises his
mistake as soon as he has done this and rushes over to Rosie’s house to tell her he loves her. Paul’s penance is to show Rosie the depth of his emotion, though he never actually tells her what he has done. As far as Bennie goes, their friendship seems to have ended. There is a mention of Bennie going off to join the military once school finishes, but their closeness seems to have ended over the muffler incident. It is Bennie who ends it by literally slamming the screen door in Paul’s face and declaring ‘I knew you’d tell’ (p.85). The older Paul regrets these actions, and wishes he could undo his ill-treatment of Bennie. In this way Goldsworthy shows us the degree of feeling different people have about the consequences of their actions.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

It is possible to view the character of Eduard Keller in many ways. Paul initially sees him as condescending and dislikes him profusely. By the end of text, however, the reader understands that Paul has developed a close and respectful relationship with his teacher.

The two statements below describe different points of view on Keller, with examples of evidence from the text that support and strengthen either interpretation. Think about whether or not the following points are a fair assessment of Keller’s teaching methods.

‘Keller is an ineffective teacher.’

Evidence from the text:

• Keller’s advice often consists of peculiar riddles, making it difficult for Paul to understand him: ‘Only those who are dirty need to wash’ (p.41).
• He patronises Paul by making him play pieces that are not challenging enough, such as The Children’s Bach (p.27).
• He has drinking and obvious emotional issues that make him erratic. See for example when he calls off a lesson when he has had too much to drink (p.73).
• He is overly critical and seldom gives positive encouragement. Paul sends him a tape of his Honours performance only to have it sent back with a detailed critique (p.124).
• He frequently insults Paul: ‘It is you who are ignorant’ (p.71).

• His view of the world is negative and pessimistic which is not good for a young man such as Paul. Compare Paul’s and Keller’s attitudes to Vienna on p.133.

• Keller rarely practises or performs himself and so is a poor model: ‘I never hear you practise’ (p.41).

• He has been limited in what he has been able to teach Paul and fails in the goal of making him a successful concert pianist.

• Keller sees only imperfection in everything and therefore will never be happy with his own performances, let alone Paul’s.

‘Keller is an effective teacher.’

Evidence from the text:

• Keller has an impeccable pedigree of musical ancestors, with his own teacher being Leschetizky (p.21).

• He was a renowned performer at the height of his career. Henisch calls him the pianist and teacher he ‘prized above all others of his generation’ (p.132).

• Taking Paul back to basics is a good thing as it undoes his bad habits and teaches him humility.

• He does give positive encouragement sometimes: ‘You should have won the competition. You were the best’ (p.113).

• He is upfront and honest for Paul’s own good, explaining, ‘A small hurt now to avoid a wasted life’ (p.113).

• He is kind and fatherly when he occasionally gives Paul gifts. See for example when he gives Paul the Czerny manuscript (p.54).

• His great piano playing is something for Paul to aspire to. As Paul observes, ‘the hands played, autonomously, with an abandon and rapture beyond anything I had ever heard’ (p.73).

• He never gives up on Paul and follows him to Adelaide to help in the competition.

• He has taught Paul all that was possible to teach; as he notes, ‘I have taught you everything you were able to learn’ (p.115).
ESSAY TOPICS

1 “If we were discussing the same man, how different our two versions. Or perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps they were not the same man, in a sense” (p.140).
‘The Keller in Austria and the Keller in Darwin are two different people.’
Discuss.
(This question asks students to look at the way Goldsworthy creates mystery around Keller and how he expresses views and values through characters.)

2 “Keller was bad for me, the worst possible teacher: revealing perfection to me, and at the same time snatching it away” (p.148).
’Keller is a discouraging teacher who seriously hinders his pupil.’
To what extent do you agree with this statement?
(This question asks students to take a position on Keller’s abilities as a teacher. Is he too discouraging and negative?)

3 “What is the difference between a great and a good pianist? ... Not much” (p.113).
‘Paul can never achieve greatness.’
Do you agree?
(This question asks students to demonstrate a point of view on what makes a ‘great’ musician and in doing so demonstrate an understanding of a key theme.)

4 ‘Paul's relationships with his friends reveal different aspects of his character and growing maturity.'
Discuss.
(This question asks students to demonstrate an understanding of the function of minor characters within the plot’s development.)

5 ‘Paul’s sexual awakening interferes with his career as a musician and his understanding of Keller.’
Do you agree?
(This question asks students to consider the ways Goldsworthy constructs a clash between Paul’s interests and how this clash affects Paul’s relationship with Keller.)
6 After Keller's death, Paul says, "a Great Man had died, whatever the crimes he felt he had committed" (p.146).

‘It is only after Keller is dead that Paul learns to appreciate his teacher.’

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

(This question asks students to present an understanding of a key theme to show how the writer expresses a point of view and values.)

7 “First impressions? Misleading of course. As always” (p.3).

How far is this statement true of the characters in *Maestro*?

(This question is asking students to examine the initial judgements some characters make about others and how true these judgements prove to be in the end.)

8 ‘*Maestro* demonstrates that pride and arrogance stop people achieving success.’

Do you agree with this statement?

(This question asks students to demonstrate an understanding of the differences and similarities between characters and sustain a detailed interpretation of the characters’ views and values.)

9 “It is you who are ignorant” (p.71).

‘Paul is on a journey to self-knowledge and experience.’

Discuss.

(This question asks students to demonstrate knowledge of character development and how this is revealed through the novel’s structure and style.)

10 ‘In *Maestro*, Peter Goldsworthy asserts that there are two types of music: the ordinary and that which is worthy of being called “art”.’

Discuss.

(This question asks students to analyse the social and cultural values embodied in the text. It has a subtext idea that music is a metaphor for other aspects of art and life.)
ANALYSING A SAMPLE QUESTION

7 "First impressions? Misleading of course. As always" (p.3).

How far is this statement true of the characters in Maestro?

This question is asking you to consider the initial impressions some characters have of each other and how true these impressions remain by the end of the text. You may also wish to consider the motivations each character has for any negative first impression. Do you agree or disagree with the contention?

Obviously, much of what Paul later discovers about Keller overrides his initial judgements. Paul does rather badly too in his initial choice of girlfriend, favouring Megan over the much more substantial Rosie. In the end, you should judge whether or not first impressions are always misleading. Perhaps some hasty judgements, such as the one regarding Keller’s alcoholism, remain correct. But overall, Goldsworthy is asking you to consider the danger of quick conclusions that have little foundation in fact or understanding. Even Keller’s alcoholism is more understandable when recognised as an effect of the horrors he has been through. Think of the following first impressions of characters and whether or not they turn out to be true. How do the characters’ perspectives change, and what do they learn that makes them change their minds?

Paul’s first impressions of Keller

- German Nazi
- Criminal with secrets to hide
- Alcoholic
- Bad teacher
- Motivation: dislikes the restrictions Keller has placed on his enjoyment of playing and finds being asked to go back to basics patronising
Keller’s first impressions of Paul

• Poorly taught
• Technique needs to be relearned from scratch
• Disrespectful adolescent
• Incapable of greatness
• Motivation: resents having to teach students at a level so beneath him; mistrusts the skill of Paul’s previous teachers

Paul’s first impressions of Megan

• Physically attractive
• Popular
• Motivation: lust

Paul’s first impressions of Rosie

• Cloying
• Desperate
• Beneath him in terms of music
• Motivation: she is an academic rival in class; takes him some time to desire her physically

THE TEXT


OTHER RESOURCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Joseph, BA (Hons), CELTA, Grad Dip Ed, PhD, has taught Literature at the University of Adelaide and the Open University in Singapore. She specialises in Australian literature and contemporary women’s literary fiction. She is an award winning short-story writer, and is currently Head of English at Korowa Anglican Girls’ School.