

# Admit ONE WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT NEWS



**FEELING GROOVY – AGAIN:** Matty Zarb and his young protégé, Minnie Marks, busking outside Filling Groovy in Peel St, Tamworth. Matty plays a free show tomorrow night at the Tamworth Tennis Club. Photo: *The Newcastle Herald*

# Busker's brush with death

## Matty Zarb lucky to be alive after surgery for tumour

TAMWORTH'S favourite busker – and one-time resident musician extraordinaire Matty Zarb – is lucky to be alive.

On Thursday, March 3, after spending several days in John Hunter Hospital, he underwent major surgery for a tumour on the pituitary gland.

His only warning that anything was amiss beforehand had been some pretty extreme headaches.

Apart from that, he was one of the healthiest people around.

This fact, according to his specialist, Dr John Christie, was what saved his life.

Matty was told the tumour was slow-growing – that he may have had it for as long as 15 years without knowing about it.

He was admitted to Taree Hospital the week before and was given pain-killers and other drugs. The tumour was pressing up against the optic nerve, so his eye was almost popping out of its socket.

"I became a case study at the hospital (John Hunter)," Matty said.

"They had read about sodium levels dropping in the

### ANNA'S COUNTRY MUSIC NOTES

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body when the brain went into trauma, so they were all really keen to keep watch over me.

"Going in to the surgery I'd been on these mind-altering drugs. Lucky I'm an old hippie or it would have totally freaked me out.

"I had all sorts of hallucinations about fairies, electric blue worms, you name it. I saw Minnie Marks (a young guitarist friend) and she was Minnie Mouse.

"When I came to in the recovery ward I had no idea where I was, I could just see these lights and heard the rolling of wheels so I thought I was at the bowling club for a sound check.

"I looked up and asked 'where's my guitar?' and I think it scared the life out of the nurses there. They said they don't normally have people talk to them in the recovery ward.

"Then when I saw all these

sick people around me, I said 'get me out of here', so they did."

After his surgery, Matty sat up and talked all night – to an 89-year-old man in the ward and a 30-year-old mum.

His vision returned to normal and instead of seeing four of everything, after they put an eye patch on him he went back to seeing just one of everything, which his doctors said was pretty astounding.

"The day after surgery I had student doctors all around me and they were checking me out. I told them the best thing they could do for me now was to get this thing out of my arm, the other thing out of my nose, and the other gadget out of my doodle because I needed to get better quickly," Matty said.

It wasn't long before Matty reached for his beloved Maton guitar – less than 24 hours after his operation.

He spent the weekend in hospital resting, but feeling agitated and wanting to be at home with wife Lesley and their children.

By Monday, he was hanging out for a good cup of coffee, so he found his way to a piano bar in the hospital.

"They're usually elderly people who donate their time to play at the piano bar," he said.

"As I sat down to enjoy my coffee this old bloke started playing *The Entertainer*, which I thought was pretty cool.

"Then when I walked out, he started playing *Lara's Theme*."

Anyone who's ever been to a Matty Zarb performance will know the significance of *Lara's Theme* to him. It's the tune that he first heard coming from a music box on his grandmother, Rose Matilda O'Keefe's dressing table – and is an integral part of his self-penned song in her honour.

"If that wasn't a signal for me to get out of there, I don't know what was," Matty said.

His surgeon, Dr Christie – whose nickname was "Golden Hands" – came to visit him by

which time Matty had packed his bag, made his bed and was sitting, anxious to be given the all-clear to leave hospital.

By a strange coincidence, that same surgeon had been in the audience at Matty's concert at Lizotte's a few weeks beforehand.

He'd never heard of Matty Zarb prior to the show, but had read about it in the paper and decided to go along.

The next thing the good doctor knew he was operating on that same musician. Small world – eh?

Throughout his whole ordeal, Matty said he wasn't sure whether it was the cocktail of drugs he was on, or what it was, but he kept hearing a particular piece of music – which at times was so loud in his head, he thought everyone else must surely be able to hear it too.

"From the time I was admitted to Taree Hospital through to the end of the operation, all I could hear was the Vivaldi Concerto for Mandolins – all of my favourite parts on different frequencies," he said.

"That piece of music was my brother's gift to me on my 14th birthday. It's one of the

most beautiful pieces of music on Earth and it stayed with me through this whole scary experience."

Just as he had hoped, he was discharged from John Hunter on Monday, March 7, just four days post-surgery.

Despite coming down from those drugs, experiencing night sweats, the shakes, sleeplessness and a few other side effects, he was pleased to be home at Harrington and get some real rest in the fine company of Lesley and his boys.

The weekend after he left hospital, Matty did two gigs.

You just can't keep a good man down, can you?

Tomorrow at 7.30pm, Matty returns to Tamworth Tennis Club for a free show for his friends and fans.

Then on Saturday, he's guest performer at the Narrabri races.

Why don't you go up and shake the hand of a bloke with more heart than Phar Lap?

Like all his old friends, I'm absolutely delighted he's lived to tell the tale of his close shave with death.

The world needs more good people like Matty Zarb in it.