

# 'Play, Dagmar, play': Violinist recalls tumour op performance

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Emerging from the depths of slumber, Dagmar Turner had barely a chance to notice the hushed intensity of the operating theatre when someone thrust her violin into her hands. It was time to play the performance of her life.

As surgeons behind her removed a tumour from her brain, Turner took up her bow and played George Gershwin's aria "Summertime", ensuring she can still perform with her beloved [violin](#) after recovery.

"The last thing that comes to your mind is 'I would really like to play my violin now'," she told AFP about her virtuoso performance on the operating table.

The British-based violinist agreed to the unconventional concert to help avoid damage to her brain during surgery.

The 53-year-old German, who plays with the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra in southern England, was diagnosed in 2013 with a slow-growing tumour after suffering a seizure during a concert.

Turner told AFP how it felt to be woken from anaesthetic as surgeons operated on her brain.

"It was like being woken up from a really [deep sleep](#)," she said, adding that she was then handed her instrument.

"It started fine and the first thing I really remembered was when they put this violin in my face, like, 'now play, Dagmar, play'.

"I was like, 'let me sleep'. It's just horrible."

The amateur musician described being able to feel "somebody standing up behind my head... telling me 'Dagmar, we have just removed 95 percent of your tumour'.

"I was utterly in shock and speechless. You know the day before you have an inoperable tumour and then the next day they tell you 95 percent of that has been taken out," she explained.

## **'Music is a healer'**

Turner hit on the plan to play her violin to protect vital cells located in the right frontal lobe of her brain, and professor Keyoumars Ashkan, consultant neurosurgeon at King's College Hospital in south London, agreed.

"I was absolutely horrified when my new oncologist said that he would think this operation would dampen my ability to play," she said.

"I'm like, 'I don't like that". That's when I suggested if I can play the violin.

"Music is a healer and music is a connector with people."

The surgery area was close to the part of the brain that controls the micro-movements of the left hand required to regulate a violin's pitch and timbre.

The medical team proposed that Turner be woken up midway through

the procedure so she could play and be monitored to make sure her coordination was not being affected.

For the concert of her life, Turner had initially considered playing "a bit of Bach, a bit of Beethoven, a bit of the Tchaikovsky violin concerto."

But in the end, she stuck with Gershwin, because she could remember it by heart.

"As a child when you learn, you have to play a lot of pieces by heart, but not when you are an old bird like me, you forget about it."

Stunning video footage of the procedure was released by the hospital, showing Turner fiddling while surgeons behind her operated inside her skull.

"It's very strange because you can't feel anything what they are doing in your head because there is no sensation," she explained.

Turner, who has a 13-year-old son and has played the violin since the age of 10, underwent the procedure last month. She left the hospital three days after the surgery.

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