

I've got an unusual way of giving cancer the boot

Bev McAlister, 73, The Patch, Vic.



Me holding the Breast Beaters DVD

Jeannie Marsh helped create the music tracks

Breast

BEATERS

Jazz blared from speakers in our lounge room.

"Listen to that," I said to my husband, Murray. He smiled and closed his eyes, lost in the moment.

We both loved all types of music, but jazz was our favourite. Our four kids had been raised in a house filled with beautiful melodies and had all learnt how to play instruments at school.

In the 1970s we'd started the Dandenong Ranges Music Council (DRMC). We brought concerts and choirs to our community and helped children and disabled people get into music.

Music can be great therapy and lately, I'd needed it.

Murray had been battling aggressive prostate cancer for two years when I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

I had surgery then endured weeks of radiation therapy.

My mind was in constant overdrive.

Will I die first, or Murray? I worried.

Listening to music made me feel positive again. If only for a minute, it took my mind off all the doom and gloom and left me feeling like I could face the world again.

At the end of my treatment, my doctor told me to exercise to prevent lymphoedema - a type of swelling common after breast cancer.

But I was so busy caring for Murray I often didn't have time.

I was also desperate for something fun and uplifting to make me feel good again. Going to a gym or standing in front of the mirror doing stretches wasn't exactly my idea of a good time.

So, I came up with an idea to combine music and post-treatment exercises to help women living with breast cancer.

My plan was to make DVD

workouts so women could do it at home. I called it Breast Beaters and discussed it with members of the DRMC.

"The message is we can beat breast cancer by exercising to a beat," I explained.

They all thought it was a wonderful idea.

One of our musicians, Jeannie Marsh, worked with a lymphedema therapist and breast care specialist to come up with tracks suitable for the recommended exercises during and after cancer treatments.

For an added bit of fun, we even came up with a mascot - a purple gorilla who beats her chest to the music.

We produced 500 DVDs and made them available for free from our website.

The response has been great.

Women have raved about how helpful our music therapy has been for their recoveries.

Our local mayor, Maria McCarthy, has provided some funding to launch Breast Beaters classes so women can enjoy the program together, but we still need more to spread the word.

I think it would be great to see ladies uniting against cancer and having a good old giggle while they do it.

Sadly, Murray recently lost his cancer battle, but I know he'd be proud of me. And I still have our beloved jazz, which reminds me of him every time I listen to it.

I'm thrilled my passion for music is now being used to help others. Together, we can beat cancer to music's beat.

"Listening to music made me feel positive"