



Yen
Tuesday 1/12/2009
Page: 114
Section: General News
Region: National Circulation: 30,000
Type: Magazines Lifestyle
Size: 1,565.37 sq.cms.
Frequency: Bi-Monthly

Brief: VERDE
Page 1 of 2



LUNCH WITH...

MAT McHUGH AND GUIDO MAESTRI

We join our musician man-crush and the Archibald-winning artiste extraordinaire for some horse play for high achievers.

This meeting of man-minds and hearts takes place in a big open warehouse space in the Sydney suburb of Chippendale, right in the hood. It's secured by a typically non-descript steel gate, one of many in this busy run-down stretch that leaves you questioning the little universe beyond. In this case it secures the creative space of Guido (Guy) Maestri, who was until earlier this year a very talented and well-selling, but little known artist. That was until one not so small painting of musician Gurrumul Yunupingu saw him take out this country's most famous art prize, the Archibald. Joining him for catch-ups this afternoon is one of his ol' mates Mr Mat McHugh – core of The Beautiful Girls and master of his own solo project.

SIGHT GAG OR SEA LEGS

When side by side, these two buddies accentuate the physical stature of the other – Guido (or Gweeds to his pals) has the cutest little waist this side of the age of 12, whilst Mat is the epitome of Man Who Can Open Jars. Between the two of them they not only cover the spectrum of good-looking, but have enough talent to feed a large village. After some banter about venues trying to extort folk as soon as they sniff a wedding reception

(Mat is engaged to his beautiful sweetheart Bianca), talk turns to the sea.

Gweeds has recently gotten back in the water after many years off a board for a reason most horrendous for the sufferer, but somewhat amusing to the listener.

"I have to take sea-sicknesses tablets," admits Gweeds under his breath.

"You get sea sick?" Enquires Mat with equal part empathy, equal part amused disbelief. "When you're sitting out the back or just paddling out?"

"Well it takes about half an hour to start. Last time I went surfing at Bluey's (on the mid-north coast of NSW) I forgot to take my tablets and I had to get out. Chundered."

"Have you seen a doctor about that?" asks Mat sensibly. "Maybe it's middle ear related or something to do with the position of your spine when you're paddling?"

But Gweeds admits to never having seen a doctor about it, not even for the good of science.

GREAT ESCAPE

The conversation leapfrogs from ginger tablets to arse cheek muscles (it's what surfers have, yep) and rests on scuba diving.

"I was in this horrific relationship once (bear in mind here that Gweeds



uses the word 'horrific' (later to describe a sandwich) and the only time when I wasn't stressed about it was the 40 minutes I was beneath the sea. You just don't think about anything else."

"But I reckon that's why anybody does anything," says Mat, "from drugs, to sex, to sport, whatever - solely for those few seconds where you don't have to think of anything else."

A random remark then about scuba diving being more extreme than badminton, leads Gweeds to a memory of an underpantsed badminton player at Peats Ridge Festival over new years and into Mat's life on the road as a travelling minstrel.

"Over summer is peak busy time for me. I didn't have a Christmas at home for about six years - I was generally in a car on the road, eating kebabs and shit."

With The Beautiful Girls playing Pyramid Rock again this year, Mat will once again be seeing in the New Year up on stage whilst Gweeds will return to the grassy valley of Peats Ridge, the festival that played a part in his Archibald win after he saw Gurrumul play there last year.

BEAT HAPPENINGS

It was music in fact that caused the paths of these two bearded go-getters

to cross originally. "I'd been playing in heavy bands," says Mat, "and just started to break out of that scene..."

"Yeah that's right, you were playing in that little café in Manly, just you in the corner with a guitar..."

"...Anika's. It was owned by our mutual friend Marissa. It was really cool, you could get really healthy food there and everyone either knew each other to start with or did by the end of the night. You played percussion and we ended up jamming together and playing a few gigs."

At this point they have a little laugh recalling the playing of bongos, djembe and an egg. "Oh yeah, it was wild, wild stuff," chuckles Gweeds.

"But you know what," admits Mat, "in music, that was some of my favourite times, of my whole life. I'd never had the nerve to play acoustic music before that because everyone on the northern beaches was into rock and punk bands. It was just filled with shirtless dudes trying to out tough each other. It was the beginning of a genesis for me."

A BLACK HABIT

At this juncture, Guido offers a round of coffee, not just from his own for real coffee machine, but his own personally roasted coffee... with its own logo no less - a nun indulging in a cup - suitably titled, The Black Habit.

Mat declines (he doesn't drink coffee) but does accept the offer of a Malt 'O' Milk biscuit. It seems that the pair share a mutual love of Arnott's least sexy biccie range.

"Oh yeah, they're good" says Mat indulging.

"Milk Arrowroots are good too," says Guido with more enthusiasm than an Arrowroot possibly deserves.

"Yeah, they are," Mat agrees, before meandering with enthusiasm into a monologue on Wheatens and fibre.

STICKS AND STONES

As well as daily dietary intakes, these two blokes have to worry about life in the public eye.

"It used to really get to me if I was misunderstood," Mat tells Gweeds with retrospective lightheartedness. "I got to the point where I thought 'Well anything you say that's bad about me now, is not as bad as what I think you're saying about me already!' My only barometer is myself and of course those people really close to me, but as far as the general public goes I can't care about that, it's too big."

Mat has had many years to adjust, but for Guido, strangers having an opinion on his work is a new experience and in the art world, no greater event invokes opinion from all factions than the Archibald.

"Yeah, I read this scathing art blog thing, it was the first time I'd read anything negative about my work. It was sort of funny, but I could understand how people could really take it on board."

'Defenders of the underground' is the term that Mat uses for those who take it upon themselves to criticise those who get to a certain level of broad appeal. "Once you win an Archibald, you're no longer part of the underground," Mat says. "And for those still in the underground you become the enemy, no matter how inarguably good something is."

OLD SCHOOL

As they wrap up, talk to turns to health and well wishes, and Gweeds mentions a recent motorbike crash in explanation of the strapping holding together two fingers on his talent hand. It's a topic a bit too close to home for Mat, who had a massive stack in Malibu last year.

"It sucks because I don't know if I'm going to be able to ride again," says Gweeds glumly.

"Just get a horse," suggests Mat helpfully.

"Yes! Is it legal? I could ride through the park each day and just park it out the back," he says nodding to the rather industrial, very un-horsey looking courtyard.

"I reckon that's the best idea. You'd get away with it too. You'd just become known as that Archibald winner. The one with the Shetland."

Mat McHugh is busy working on a new Beautiful Girls album, whilst Guido currently has an exhibition on at the Tim Olsen gallery in Sydney. Both are looking further into the laws pertaining to the keeping of farm animals within city limits. ☺