

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 14/04/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The April **Songwriters Society of Australia (SSA)** monthly concert was at The Dunkirk Hotel (205 Harris St, Pyrmont. On the corner of Harris Street and Pyrmont Bridge Rd) on the ground floor. It is held every 2nd Monday of the month – Russell has his SongsOnStage concerts every other Monday night.

On the SSA night on the 14th of March there were about eleven players all of which were songwriters playing original material.

For songwriters, it's the perfect time to listen to how others approach songwriting, being inspired, all the while socialising and networking to find out what's happening in the world of songwriting. A lot of songwriters come along just for that and don't actually play.

As usual here was a profusion of talented songwriters playing and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he knew: "And thanks to Jack Peck, Steve Walsh, Linda Beagrie, and everyone else for coming along to listen! If you ever want to book at the monthly SSA Nights then contact Russell at songsonstage@gmail.com, which is good for any of the weekly open mics or any of the SongsOnStage gigs as well.

Rory Faithfield: Rory was our first act for the night with an Aussie background he's been living in Ireland for quite a while so back for a holiday and performing some of his songs for us tonight. Starting off with "*For The Gold*" Rory takes us on a 6/8th waltz that captured the crowd's attention. Rory has a superb vocal full of a warm, passionate fullness and a subtle vibrato. The lyrics annunciation is very clear and creates a real presence in the room. A great chorus that strongly delivers. Jocelin thought that he had a John Denver feel. "*To Be Your Darling*" was next on the list. Written about waking up believing you could be somebody's darling. "Is it too late," is such a super hook line, "Is it too late to be somebody's darling somehow." Once again into the 6/8th territory in a strong Ozrock theme. Rory has all the aspects of a great balladeer. "*Window In My Mind*" shows that Rory is the 6/8th master. Written for Bobby Sands the hunger striker in Ireland. Love of a prison break style song. There are high chordal strums to start with and a Celtic feeling. Once again Rory's great vocal dominates the room while the lyrics have an extraordinary depth. The song sounds like an Anthem complete with a U2 like bass drop in. There's an intricate balance between the high chords and the passionate vocal depth. In Rory's last song, "*Your Eyes Adjust To The Dark*" he uses a 6/4th polyrhythm with 6/8th. Written with the aid of a self-help book you can definitely hear those time changes. Once again, the song has a great chorus that's very anthemic. The lyrics sing so well its very sing along for the audience in a great Ozrock feel. It's a pity Rory is headed back to Ireland as he is a great writer and performer. [Rory Faithfield on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Sparkle: Sparkle is as Sparkle does. With "*Here Comes My Heart*" her talents really sparkle a plenty. Done in a 2-beat country style with slight operetta vocalisations the song has a strongly repeated melody at the outro. "*Kiss Me Kiss Me Never Stop*" was written about a former boyfriend. Don't with an 18th Century delivery style. Again a 2-beat toe tapper which goes over well with its Music Hall traditions. A great crowd sing along as the chorus is really catchy. Sparkle then followed this song with another crowd-catcher, "*I Am Addicted To You*" which had an operatic start. Done in a clawhammer style it contains lots of phrases. I went to tune up and Jocelin took over the writing. She wrote: "The song's melody is like rowing a boat. Beautiful picking and great lyrics. This one has the audience singing along. Sparkle's last song of the night was "*Don't Bring Me Down*" which had Jocelin writing: "The song was played in a minor key with a nice control of the vocal." I then came back to reclaim the reviewer's pen. Sparkle uses some nice quick chord changes and a good use of dynamics which add to the song's flavours. Head nodding stuff that could be good if done as a rock song, operatic a bit like Pavlov's Dog (70's band). One of your best performances so far, Sparkle, especially with the last three songs.



Jocelin Chan: Jocelin has a sweet vocal and a extreme sense of melody which comes out in her own material – she does amazing things with covers at non songwriter's gigs. Starting off with her ode to her hometown of Hong Kong, "*Every Time I Think About Home*," you can feel the grief as she's away and the city is constantly changing without her – it's not the place it used to be. I felt the same about my hometown of Moree, especially with the passing of my parents, so I have very little to do with the town now. So, on the very rare times I do pass through Moree, some things never change and nostalgia reigns, while so much changes and my connections with the town get weaker and weaker. That feeling is captured so well in the lyrics of Jocelin's song with its superb, memorable melody and heartfelt, passionate lyrics. The crowd of listeners responded appropriately with enthusiasm. One of my personal favourites called "*Tick The Boxes*" was next about dealing with an uncaring bureaucracy. Done in 3/4th time the song waltzes us through administrative failures. "Tick the boxes and they'll be gone" ... "To satisfy the bureaucrats." All problems are sorted if boxes are ticked is the prime thinking behind most bureaucracy. Jocelin captures the feeling of angst and frustration when dealing with the number's mentality. There was a strong audience response as there would be a lot of empathy towards the subject and Jocelin's brilliant melody – she is definitely the queen of melody! Then Jocelin asks us "*How To Be Human Today*" with its strong strumming drive and questions about religious ideas. Added to that are two lyrical ideas from other songs "From a highway to Hell to a stairway to Heaven" with a super strong melody and you have an extremely catchy earworm that'll hook any listener. Such a strong song about the afterlife performed so well. Jocelin's last song of the set was the one that everybody connects well with, yeah its



"Hey, Boss". An employee's lament of all the aspects of working for someone which grabbed everyone, especially with the sing along hooks. It has an especially brilliant Middle Eight. Quite a few people came up and told Jocelin it was her best song. Once again, a superlative performance from a gifted melody songwriter. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the [Members Section](#).

Gav Fitzgerald: Many thanks to Al Crew for the next review and John Chesher for the photography as Gav took to the microphone. Starting off with his classic from his Velvet Road days, "*The River*". Written during one of Gecko Music's Songwriting Workshops it had Al noting: "A song that harnesses the river as a metaphor for life and like a river the song just never stops flowing. There's a nice little lead guitar interlude that makes me think that the river, like life, must ebb as well as flow. As always from Gav the song has a powerful, driving beat and vocals." Next up was a song Gav wrote about a relationship from the 1990's called "*Public Convenience*", written after another more recent break up so the passion has more of an edge to it. Al musing wrote the following: "A bluesy, choozy, floozy look at a past romance and the expectations that may or may not have been realised. "I ain't no public convenience" conjures up images that might be deemed private conveniences." Song number three was about how some paramours can change their minds in a relationship. Called "*Love Me, Love Me,*" it's a list song detailing how a lover's views on the relationship changes over a week. Al noted "4/4 rock at its most powerful best. If you can't dance to this, you can't dance." Gav's a country boy with a hometown of Moree, well actually halfway between Moree and Collarenebri near Bullarah Hall to be precise. So, he wrote "*Out Of My Head*" about the experiences of country people in the Big Smoke, even though he's lived and worked in Sydney for over forty years now. Al Crew was pensive: "We've all been there! Some nifty little jazz orientated chords against a solid rock beat/feel. I want to be "Out of my head!" Thanks again Al for the reviews and to John for the photo. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the [Members Section](#).



Jill Riddiford: Jill tends to favour a light folk style of songwriting. This was very evident in her first piece titled "*Game Over*", with its very passionate lyrics that tells it like it is. A good strong song to start the set with. The audience quietened down for her material so were listening well. Then we head in a Spanish direction with "*Al Reves*" which Jocelin wrote: "The song was played in a minor key and was very Spanish in delivery." I like the strong use of dynamics with a mix of English and Spanish lyrics all done to a Latino feel. Jill's next tune was "*Ibiza Song*", about the island in the Mediterranean Sea near Spain. Done in a light folkie style with pensive vocals. There is a good dynamic variation between the picked verse and strummed chorus. The strong melody suits the lyrics well with its minor key feel. Jill's last song of her performance was "*Home Coming*" – "Spiderman" yells out Marvel fanatic, Jocelin. All the feeling and imagery that comes with a large dose of nostalgia during a visit home. One of the best lines of the night: "Out of the danger zone into the past," is so descriptive and has so many directions to go. Overall, it's super to see Jill constantly improving her stage presence and highlighting her songs. [Jill Riddiford on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the [Members Section](#).



Cameron Alcorn: It is interesting to see a fellow Fender Acoustasonic player and how they use the guitar. It's also great to see a younger person take up the songwriting mantle as a lot of the older crew will soon give our all and be gone into history. The young inherit the Earth and it's superb to see so many take up the skills and work on their songwriting and performing talents in a live arena. They are the ones that write the songs for future generations. Cameron started with the Soul delivery of "*Catch Me When I Fall*". A super nasal style of vocal which really suits his material well. The passion literally oozes from the stage as there's a hint of Coldplay but with much more depth in the recital. Listening to "*You Can Have It All*" you can tell we are listening to a very unique and talented vocalist. The lyrical content has an elaborate depth while the delivery on this song is more folk like. I really like the vocal rhythm changes. "*Windowsill*" (I like the song's title!) features a lot of picking in a folk ambient rock feel. Super lyrics once again the song was developed after Cameron was reading a particular book. There's an almost slight Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel tone to this piece which Cameron presents well. "*I Just Want You*" is a definite love song done in a ¾ time and a bass riff picking. My nearest comparison would be folk singer Passenger, but Cameron has more warmth in his vocal. The change in the vocal register during the song is magnificent – such superb dynamic vocal use. One of those songs that just grab you – very memorable! Simple, but incredibly effective. I hope Cameron comes to play at future Society Concerts as he is so talented. I also hope he got his jacket back he left behind as it was left with the bar staff on the night. [Cameron Alcorn on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the [Members Section](#).



Roger Dileria: It's good to see Roger D back as he was so good last month. "*If I Had A Time Machine*" started off his set with his Gibson Marauder singing through a phaser – "You brought me so much joy." His style really reminds me of Richard Clapton's material. There are great chordal changes that add to the song's flavourings. I like the bass line as its very rhythmical. Usually, Roger writes about recent love relationships, but he then pulled out "*I Don't Want Your Love*" which was written as a co-write, with Frank in the audience, back in 1984. I particularly like the soft rock verses up against the punk rock chorus which re-dates The Pixies doing that. "I can live without the pain," such a powerful statement Jocelin said "Ouch!" For his most recent girlfriend Roger wrote, "*I'll Love You For The Rest Of My Life*," which has a 60's jazz style to it. It was my turn for a beer run, so Jocelin took over the reviewer reins: "I like the Afro-like curly hair! A very rhythmic, catch song with a strong chorus of "I'll love you all of my life". I also missed the start of "*Bob Dylan Walked Into A Bar*" which Jocelin



thought “Gave off a mysterious feeling.” It was a ballad about a meeting with Bob Dylan, not sure if its fact, or a fantasy? The song spotlights great dynamics and rhythm. The lyrics make it seem like they met and chatted in a bar – “The moral of this story and the moral of the song, you gotta catch lightning in a storm” Such a great line. That’s one song I’d really like to read the lyrics for, to understand it more. Once again Roger has shown his immense songwriting and performing abilities to an appreciative audience. We hope to hear/see him at many future Society Concerts. [Roger Dileria on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

John Chesher: Former head of the SSA John displays his talents as a songwriter and performer to the amazement of the non-initiated. This is especially so in “*Just The Licks I’ve Learnt*” where John shows that he is a fingerpicker extraordinaire. This song details how he became this way – “Take an old lick and make it brand new.” John says we are the sum of all the licks we have learnt in our musical journeys – the more licks learnt the better a player you are. A great song for all guitarists and songwriters – “Find great links, make mistakes with them while learning them and turn them into new songs.” Another lesson in guitar mastery from John! Then one of John’s humorous songs, but with a message, called “*Why Me?*” with its story about a guy for whom everything, and I mean everything goes South! The true tale of a pessimist, but with what was going on its not surprising he’s a pessimist – “I’m even prepared to work!”, “But it all goes to some other jerk!” From being the victim of a bank robbery, to poor performances in the bedroom the continued cry is “Why me?” The answer could be “Why not?” Very funny, but with a profound message about how to look at life. After some tuning time, we had an exploration of the trails of DNA through humanity in “*Generations Changing*” – “You are your father, Luke.” Written



after John observed his father’s mannerisms in his children, and he’d died before they were born. The picking in this song was emotionally charged, with John singing this with an inner strength. One of my favourites of John’s songs is “*When You Go*” as I have been on the graveside of a number of friends and this song expresses that emotional situation so well – “I always thought I’d be the first to go.” I was a little wild at Uni and when I expressed the same sentiment at a Uni mate’s funeral all my mates laughed as they agreed with me! Maybe it’s true that only the good die young? John has a great emotive chorus to make the song truly memorable. Jocelin wrote: “The picking sounds very John Chesher. “When you go, may you walk in starlight. You’ll never be alone, when you go out on your own.” A very country style song.” Hearing John you have a masterclass in many aspects of songwriting and tonight he was in his best form. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

Al Crew: backed by Russell Neal on lead guitar and harmonies. The boys started off with a song new to me called “*Jesus Whiskey*” which is a brilliant song as it’s so catchy and memorable from the first go. “Two birds one stone,” and we are into the Deep South Bluesville, but with Al’s ample sense of humour. So many people were singing along from a few listens to the chorus. “*We Had Some Time*” is another one that’s new to my ears and has a Bluegrass Country & Western feel to it. “We played the bar” with a real foot tapper and great riffs from Russell. These last two are super additions to their ongoing set of songs. Then it was time for a couple of Al Crew classics, the first being “*Another Word For Lonesome*”. With an obvious nod to the Country and Western genres and Russell doling out extremely memorable riffs the



crowd’s participation grew as the newbies were initiated into the AlRuss fan club (Or should they call themselves Walruss? Wow, its Al & Russ?) Extremely memorable descriptive lines like “Whiskey on the table where there used to be none.” Such an emotive song about the loneliness experienced at the breakup of a relationship – “Don’t want to be lonesome again.” Where that empty hole appears in your life, and you try and fill it with whiskey to ease the grief. As pain flashes across your chest, like a deep emotional knife, leaving you slightly winded and the memories surge like an emotional tide, each one barbed to piece your very soul as you ask “why?” with never a clear answer. Conjecture and the sharp brown taste that burns your throat are your only comfort till daylight purges some of the miasma that haunts your mind starting life again. This was followed by another song about a breakup called “*I’m Here Where Are You?*”. That starting riff by Russell is absolutely brilliant. Then I love the rhyme between “Rosa’s Cantina” and “Got a little meaner” as the alcohol kicks into the throes of loneliness – “I’m still not over you” is the lyrical punch line. However, this song is a crowd favourite, and the chorus is sung with a lusty swagger by everyone in earshot. Al and Russell always entertain the crowd so well that everyone looks forward to them playing. Tonight was no exception as both men are so gifted and talented, but the Sum is 1 plus 1 equal 4 when they play together. [Al Crew on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Ken D’Aran: Almost like a complete turnaround like we are on a giant random spinning wheel we head into jazzier territories with Ken’s material. Starting off with “*Listen*” which Jocelin reviewed as I was on a beer shout: “Run around” and “Spinning around”, Ken has some beautiful uses of rhyme. “Sound, round”, “Fade away,” “day”, “so much to say”, “Write it down,” “Let the words bounce around”, etc. All done to a jazz genre I bet. Is this a new one, Ken? Next up was one of my favourites of Ken’s, “*Shadow Life*”. Not because I was an itinerant worker hitching around Australia, but I remember the eight-hour trips between Sydney and Moree by car. We’d leave late at night to avoid the traffic and travel through yellow lighted silent towns with the only noise being the semi’s air brakes cushioning down. I’ve often been to Motels next to the highways and the sounds being influenced by the Doppler effect as the semis take fresh produce for those far off communities. We used to have fresh fish from the coast every second day in Moree’s Balo Street, driven from the early morning catch on the coast four hours inland. That shadow life is a reality for many people. That’s why I love the imagery of this song of the roads as I have a vast experience of it myself. I like how the timing changes as one minute you are on the road, next you are at a truck stop café with sleepy workers praying for the morning in their eyes. As the Sun rises from its horizon rest, the birds start chirping and Ken sings “The road is my home” with a super jazz traveller rhythm that’s “shifting through the night.” I once did a 22-hour bus trip from Sydney to Adelaide, across the Hay plains and that first sunbeam that kisses your eyes as you sip a hot sweet tea at a stop reminds you of the glories of travel. Ken has that in this in this song! I remember when all the passengers, many with CoVid were let off the Ruby Princess cruise ship in 2020 and the buck



passing that occurred. I'm reminded of this event every single time I hear Ken's "*Blame Game*" a song about people not accepting responsibility – who's gonna fall on their sword? Not me! The song starts with some tasty Latino style riffs then into crisp jazz chordal stabs. Ken sang this really well tonight, "I'm not the one to blame." A great observational song where everyone blames someone else, politicians blame each other, the husband blames the wife, etc. Ken's last song was one he's famous for, "*Tangled Tango*", which could have almost been written for Trump's administration except Ken's been playing for many years. "Mine's bigger than yours, I've got the biggest terrorist of all", "If it's a game of power". The dance of all those who yearn for power, privilege and greed as they circle around each other with knives sheathed, but the eyes of a killer. Its quite humorous as it's done to a tango rhythm, and you can see the protagonists play. It's a bit like "*We're All Water*" off "*Some Time in New York City*" in its playful comparisons. Ken is always a talented writer and performer, but he likes going on late, near the end but we recommend staying around to catch his show. [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

Russell Neal: The main man himself has a go this month. Starting with his classic, "*Bright Moon*", one of Jocelin's favourites. Done in a 1920's jazz style, with Ken adding a whistle solo from the audience – "Wipe the tears from her eyes". This song has a speakeasy ambience, all flappers, cloche hats, fedoras, newsboy caps, Manhattan cocktails, dim lighting and Art Deco. Where's your tux, Russell? Watch out for the raid! Russell then played a couple of his late brother's best songs. Technically not covers as they were never hits and they keep his brother's memory alive so commendable. First off was the best, "*This Old Car*" which is such a beautiful song with all the observational imagery about being broken down on a country road. However, the song has other meanings apart from the obvious, especially about life – "I'm like this old car broken down again." The imagery of the radio playing, the moon rising and chilling out until the car finally restarts like life restarts after a break. One of my favourite lines is "The radio plays there's a killer out on the road, but he's not here as I'm here all alone." The audience really got into it as its such an emotive, appealing song and Russell honours his brother well playing it. The second song from his brother's collection is the slightly humorous "*Sweet Sugar Daddy*" which was written if I remember correctly by Russell's brother overhearing two girls at a bar talking. "Find a sweet sugar daddy, let him treat you nice, find a sweet sugar daddy, let him treat you right", which is such a strong chorus that everyone sings along to it. Pure rock'n'roll complete with Chuck Berry style riffs which I really enjoyed. Such a very catchy song. What could you do after the delights of "*Sweet Sugar Daddy*"? Well, it can only be "*The Lady Loves Women*" I suppose. This is a real audience go-er, which has them all singing along with gusto. "She's in her post heterosexual phase" is one of my favourite lines. Such a funny song about meeting an old girlfriend who "Introduced me to her partner, Jane." All the interactions between the protagonist and the new couple are given a different angle, like when they want to have a baby, they have to use the "turkey baster", etc. Everyone really enjoys the lusty humour of this song. A great way to finish the April Society Concert night, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

