

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 13/04/26

2nd 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 2nd 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 13th of April there were eleven players booked with nine doing original songs in their set. Paul Li, a master songwriter was very disappointing as he

only played covers. Unlike the previous month it was a nice balmy night as the cold hadn't visited Sydney yet.



knew: "And thanks to Jack Peck, Linda Chesher, 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.

For songwriters, the Society Concert is a great time to listen to how others approach songwriting, become inspired, all the while socialising and networking to find out what's happening in the world of songwriting. A number of songwriters come along just for that and don't actually play.

There were many talented songwriters playing on the night and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he



As well, I video every Songwriter, with permission, on the Society Concert nights and the full video of their performance is available to Society members – there is a 20 second video attached to each review, but you have to become a member to gain the full video.

Russell was on task with his P.A, sound engineering and MCing of the night. So, the P.A was ready when the first act of the night, Rory, was asked up to the stage. There was a cracked speaker sound which needed some adjustment to fix.

Rory Faithfield: Rory was first cat out of the basket tonight with a "*Window In My Mind*". Rory said he was losing his mind over this one as he was finalising it for recording. He had an epiphany about coming out on the 1st, or 3rd floor which looked the same in Japan while eating a delicious chicken sandwich that started off this song. Done in waltz time you can tell the Irish influences. As usual Rory prefers to mine the veins of folk music using superb dynamics. Rory, before the next song announced that he had been born in Sydney town, so "*Back In Sydney Town*" is an ode to his childhood home. The song is lightly picked with St Mary's bells a ringing in essence. A traveller's lament, "I found my way, one more day..." I know the feeling, after travelling extensively overseas one of the best feelings is making it back home to Sydney safe and sound with stories to tell. Rory's last song was "*Indian Ocean Blue*" which is one of my favourites as I've been to Perth and travelled around W.A so I know some of the sentiment. Rory used to play this one with a loop pedal with a story about loving to head to W.A – "Say goodbye, my love" – yeah, I once had a long-distance love affair, but my girl was in Melbourne. Such a superb chorus, "Say farewell," and a great hook line – "Bound for Indian Ocean blue." I like the middle eight, "For a while." The song then builds in dynamics to the quieter drop to the last verse. Once again, a definite show of songwriting tour de force from Rory, who grabs every audience he plays to.



Gav Fitzgerald: Many thanks to Al Crew for doing my write ups and I'm not sure who did the photography but thanks also to them. I need to write these things down on the night. For the first song, "*Smile On My Face*", which Gav wrote over half a century ago about being in a situation where you have to have a smile on your face all the while you are seething inside. Lucky I'm Cancerian so I can have different walls up! Al noted the following: "'A smile right there on my face' pumps up the tone, style and presence of this pop orientated tune. Theres a feel good...well-constructed and memorable – everything it takes to climb the charts. I'm imagining it with a multi-vocalist chorus giving it a power lift and a smile on my face." To quote the internet, "The Samurai, a Japanese TV show, was a cultural phenomenon in Australia in the 1960s, introducing kids to a new world of martial arts, ninjas, and samurai." Gav was one of those children and the lead character was "*Shintaro*" who Gav wrote a homage to both the program and his childhood. Al mused on the performance: "A strong storytelling of how life used to be, the same place in a different time. Gav uses distinctive "talking/singing vocals" and equally distinctive Japanese tuned guitar licks and progressions." Gav's last song was the view of city living from the perspective of a country boy called "*Going Out Of My Head*". Al thought that: "The song has a jazzy intro that goes into a gritty first verse. There's a strong use of relevant repetition of the lyrics in the chorus – "Going out..." There's a lovely little jazzy lick under the "Going out" outro. Thanks again Al for doing a great write up and to whoever took the photos.



[Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

Jill Riddiford: Jill started off with “*Soldier Of Faith*” which was done in a folk style and constant rhythm strums. Quite lyric heavy to tell the story which Jill does well. Jill’s second song was “*High Fidelity*” which had a Dylan-ish feel to it, so definitely from the folk side of the line. I like the hook line and the song has shades of nostalgia – “When all is said and done.” Jill’s third song is a cover which we don’t cover at a songwriter’s night.



Al Crew & Russell Neal: This brilliant duo always makes Al’s songs seem massive. Starting with “*Last Love Letter*” with Russell doing a lap steel style slide and in Al’s lonesome themes this could be a new song for the pair as I’m not sure I’ve heard it before. “Words chosen so carefully” – we have all sent them. “My heart and soul is in my hands” – such superb C & W lyrics from the mind of Al. This song is the definitive white man’s blues. A brilliant chorus to cry into your beer, or whiskey (Your choice). Then the boys started into “*Every Now And Then*” with the line “There’s a road I go down” which holds the soul of the Blues. This had an effect on Ken who started on the whiskies! “Yippee kai oh, yippee kai ah” in a minor Blues/Country feel. A real tapper about a man who says, “I wish I could settle down.” Those of us who like travelling know this feeling oh too well! Then the last song was one of my favourites, “*Oh Mexico*” as I’ve



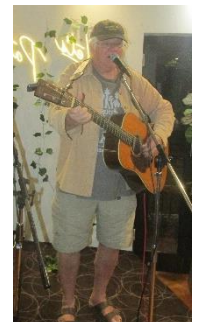
travelled a bit through Mexico and Al’s insistent riff really captures the flavours of the country. Such a superb riff that you feel you have to move to it and such brilliant lyrics in a escapism ballad. Russell adds his deft lead touches as we aim for the ending. Then “*Woops*” we have another verse, and the crowd loved it. The audience really got into the song with rousing choruses. Al & Russ are such a fun duo to listen to, even with their sad songs! They are such a “Wow!” that I think they should take the first letter of that word, add it to Al then add Russ and you come up with WAIRuss which is similar to Walrus, maybe a new stage name? [Al Crew & Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section



John Chesher: As John arrived on stage Ken jokingly said “Unprofessional, John Chesher, unprofessional” as John proceeded to tune up on stage. Maybe because John’s car was side swiped while parked this morning. The front of his car had its bumper bar completely torn off and the culprit didn’t stay around. No wonder John wasn’t his usual organised self. Maybe, also, that’s why John started his set with the very appropriate “*Why Me?*”, the ultimate pessimist’s song about his job, being robbed and the pre-emptive strike. This all done with a great chorus, a persuasive rhythm and tight little riffs which had Ken whistling again. It’s something we might say sometimes, like when John saw his car this morning – “Now if I can find the car/guy who did it!” John’s next song, “*A New Found Freedom For Karen*” which he’d written a long time ago. Some people need to have a relationship, in fact a mate of his had a new girlfriend every two weeks! Sometimes a relationship ending is a “chance to make changes in your life.” Sometimes an ending is a new beginning. I’m going through that process myself at the moment and I know what is meant by the freedom part. John was deciding as to what he’d be playing next when he said, “Gav’s here so more original songs.” So, John launched into the



atmospheric picking of “*Generations Changing*” which had the feel of eagles soaring around mountain tops. Ken must be in a whistling mood, maybe it’s the good whiskey? This song has a folk blues edge to it in a story of how a family has traits that run through them. Not just physical but behavioural like John’s dad’s characteristics in his grandchildren who he never met. A brilliant performance as usual from John. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Bony: Bony sings to self-recorded tapes so he can concentrate on the singing and the express of his soul, hip hop style. Starting off with “*Cover Up*” you can really hear the presence in Bony’s great voice as he commands the crowd’s attention. I like the dropouts that set up the chorus. Bony’s material and delivery reminds me of Seal’s songs, full of super dynamics. The song has such a super hook that is immediately catchy. Bony does some brilliant vocal scatting and harmonies with the loops. Bony’s second song has a kind of genre change as “*I Know*” has shades of folk millennial music in it, especially as it features the acoustic guitar. Bony gives a very emotive soulful delivery, which makes this one less about the technology and more about the passion. The unusual 7/8 timing adds a further flavour to the mix. Bony then did a cover which, unfortunately, being about songwriting we don’t review. However, I’ve heard Bony a number of times around the open mic venues and he always presents his material with a fiery intensity. So, I hope we hear him again on the Society stage with his original songs. [Bony on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Marcus Flanagan: I like Marcus' material as he plays a rock genre but talks about technology. He started off with "*Electronic Shelter*" which began with a minor riff that was very catchy. Then the singing comes in a la Franz Ferdinand like. Such a super riff in a great song. The hook is quite subtle, but it embeds itself well into the subconscious and becomes extremely sing along. You can definitely imagine the drums and bass behind this kicking it along. "You're my guide, my helper, my electronic shelter" – superb lyrics. Memories run free in through the fields of nostalgia in "*Jessica, I See Ya*" which was written when Marcus was 15 or 16 about a girl who lived down the road. The song started with a grunge picking style then the hook before launching into the full-on hook – "Some poor girl with a broken heart and a head full of shattered dreams." Then that super superb hook bites the memory again – I have the imagery of a mosh pit band going nutso on this on this as the crowd seethes like emotional lava in front of them. The dynamics are raging brilliantly. Marcus' last song gets back into the technology theme with "*Robot Invasion*" which has a driven rock grunge kick, almost Metal in style. The chord changes are dramatic and dynamic leading to the insanely catchy hook – we'd better prepare for the future with Marcus' ideas of technology overkill in a Hawkwind essence – "What I've got in store for you!" It had Ken tapping away in a Sci-Fi rocker. A plethora of great songs that had everyone's heads or hands moving. Hopefully we'll see Marcus in future concerts as his songs have so much verve and energy. [Marcus Flanagan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Kenneth D'Aran: If you were to describe Ken in one word it would be "laconic". He always seems to be laid-back, with a whiskey, or wine, in hand. However, he is a natural powerhouse of producing quality songs which seems to be at odds with his perceived persona. There is definitely a creative mind lurking behind those glasses to come up with songs like "*While I Still Have Wings*". It starts off with a Mexican Civil War style riff that morphs as the vocals soon follow, then the strum kicks in – "What could possibly go wrong?" A song about getting on in years, but Ken still has the passionate drive of emotive songwriter. I agree with you, mate, that that sentiment is wholeheartedly embraced by so many people. Another mate of mine said to me recently its time to clock out and live quickly till the clarion call. I, in no uncertain terms, told him what I thought about that idea! Till they shove the dirt on top of me I will strive and battle the forces of mediocrity in life. So, Ken's song, "*While I Still Have Wings*" resonates with my thinking. "*Blast Off*" was written in 2019 – I remember Ken playing it for the first time at the Paddington RSL. An ecological themed song about leaving an extremely polluted Earth. "Bound for somewhere else to destroy," said Ken. Done in a jazz introspective style it counts down to the actual blast off done on the guitar. Growing up in the country I recognise all the imagery of driving through country towns at night in Ken's last song, "*Shadow Life*", the yellow lights, the truckies' servos, the sound of air brakes, the empty quiet streets and the sometimes silence menace of the dark streets off the main route. After Ken finished his tertiary studies, he decided to travel around Australia as an itinerant worker, hitching rides between growing season to pick fruit, etc. "Drifting along the road," as Ken must have been a modern-day swagman as "this is the road, and the road is my home." One of my favourite lines from this song is "shifting through the night" which combines the imagery of moving between locations at night and the shifting of the gears by the truckies who'd picked him up as a hitchhiker. "Wind in your hair, lights appear, thumbs out – we're shifting." Ken has delivered in spades tonight as usual. [Kenneth D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Russell Neal: Then Russell finished off the first round with a trio of some of his best material. Starting off with "*You Know Where I Want To Be*", with all its inbuilt sense of longing – "You know how I feel." This was the first song Russell ever wrote and has a tasty 16th Century style riff that has the air of King Henry the VIII tone – "It's tough at the top, with no room to spare." A Tudor Medieval song along that features some superb changes in the middle eight. Then it was time to revisit the man who likes things tough in "*Mr Hardway*", a song that everyone loves to sing along with. Done in a late-night jazz blues style the lyrics venture from chasing three legged chickens to making love in a canoe standing up! For the first timers there was astonished laughter and from the old hands there were happy smiles as everyone sang along in gusto. How could you top that song, but Russell did with his equally classic, "*The Lady Loves Women*." The ballad of meeting your past that became twisted all done with Chuck Berry style riffing. Linda Chesher joined Russell on stage singing harmonies for this song – "I really don't blame her as I love women too." Then Russell had a coughing solo, a la Skyhooks, before finishing on a high note of audience participation for the night. As usual a top set, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Gav Fitzgerald: As there was some time left over Russell asked Gav if he'd like to do a few more. So, Gav complied with two of his classics. First off was his grief song written a Liz Scott Gecko Music Workshop called "*The River*". Full of John Fogerty influences both in the musical blues style and lead breaks you can tell why Gav was called "Swamp Dog" by some of his fellow staffers at work (Bill Rush especially!) when he had them listen to the recorded version. The second classic was "*Kate's Friend*" which was partially written during a Velvet Road band rehearsal. Gav's enthusiasm for blues is equalled by his zeal for reggae and ska. However, Gav has adapted that style into what he calls Whiggae, or "white reggae", which has elements of the above three musical styles. Basically, a song about liking a girl but having Kate, as a friend, who might be upset by this circumstance. The audience sang along with the chorus on this one. [Gav Fitzgerald 2nd Time on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the **Member's Section**.



Kenneth D'Aran: Ken also got some time to do a couple more of his originals. Starting off with, "*Listen*" which had a fluid atmosphere – "Running around, spinning around, with my feet just off the ground" which sounds busy and stressful. This is then balanced by the line "So much to say, on this rainy day" or "Write it down it is so profound." You soon realise the song is about songwriting and how great songs can be lost in the general everyday business. However, Ken adds those flavoursome melodies that really make the song shine. Maybe the lack of time in a day might have also influenced the writing of "*Time Bossa*"? With jazz intentions and a Bossa Nova rhythm the song has these more-ish stop start changes that are excellent and differentiates from anything similar. I like how Ken is scatting over the rhythmical changes as well. "Time, time, time, time" – I definitely like the repetition as it fully embeds the hook. A great way to end the April Society Concert, Ken. [Kenneth D'Aran 2nd Time on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the **Member's Section**.

