

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 11/08/25
Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The August **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 11th of August there were eleven players booked with two not doing original songs in their set.

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 Illya Szwec, Linda Beagrie, Alicia, Axel, James Brannelly, 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.

The Dunkirk Hotel was full of a hearty crowd with lots of chatter and laughter. The stage was flanked by tv screens of ABC News and AFL commentary. Ordered great food, the chicken schnitzel with mushroom sauce, chips & salad. It was cold outside, but toasty warm inside as the acts started:

Russell Neal: Russell took to the stage first this month to check if the sound was okay through the system. Starting off with the impassioned plea of “*You Know How I Feel*” which has a Medieval picking feel and deft little touches. There are great dynamics between the picking and the strumming sections. Russell told us it was written forty-one years ago “when I was six” – yeah, right Russell. © This was followed by “*Antidote For Love*” with its brilliant lyrics on the philosophy of amour – “we all need a teaspoon of...” You can feel the anger and grief of love rejection in the words – “That’s what girls are made of and boys should be afraid of.” This is a song for all who need an antidote for love so they can forget that person and move on quickly. The teaspoon of the antidote quickly morphs into a bucket then an ocean of it. We’ve all been and wished for the cure. Russell has been playing “*Trish*” a lot of late – do you need a teaspoon of the previous song’s medication, mate? This is the ballad of a relationship from the start, “We were friends, of friends, of friends” to the resigned finish. I like the nice chordal leads and it’s a great change from the picking to the



strumming which adds a jazz edge. There were fewer acts tonight so Russell allowed the beginnings acts to have four songs. Song number four Russell was his classic crowd favourite, “*Mr Hardway*”. Humour done with a growling rock’n’roll base. The story of a friend of Russell’s who prefers to struggle to do things – he must think its character building or something. The song has some mighty lead riffs and lyrics like “It may be crazy but it ain’t no crime.” The audience participation was overwhelming as everyone sang along. A great start to the night’s Society proceedings, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Sparkle: There’s a definite personality lift when Sparkle takes to the stage with her positive viewpoints on life. Starting out on a “*Pathway To Dreams*” Sparkle demonstrates her abilities with picking the guitar and an operetta style vocal. The performance really calmed the audience down after Russell’s last song. Then it was the turn of the “*Sweet Shy Guy*” which was also picked with an operatic delivery. Think of a high-pitched choir girl vocal. You can hear the admiration of the “Sweet shy guy” who espouses all of the things Sparkle wants in a man – not the rough and tumble footy player for her! The audience appreciated Sparkle’s honest performance and vibrant delivery. Then it was a strummed start for “*Demolition Man*”, although the vocals tended to stay in that high end opera style. The song is quite exploratory – “doesn’t matter if you drown”. The song is full of action hero imagery. There’s a touch of the spaghetti western in the musical style - Ennio Morricone eat your heart out. Sparkle’s last song was “*Slow Down*” which had a great vocal melody. I like the claw hammered backing chordal progression while the slow down to the chorus is excellent. This is definitely a keeper as its such a good song. A good performance tonight, Sparkle.

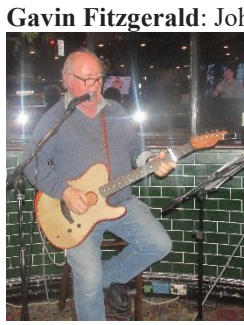


Cameron Alcorn: First thing about Cameron is his great guitar – yeap, he has a Fender Telecaster Acoustasonic like I do.

Cameron started off with “*What If I Was To Drive*”, which had been influenced by watching The Truman Show movie. Done in a modern folk style – think someone like Passenger – Cameron starts off with a warm resonant vocal then goes into an equally as good falsetto. He has a very unique style of soul. Vocal tones are part Wheatus and part Passenger, so quite generous and with good depth that drive the lyrics well. “*I Just Want You*” features some nice picking from Cameron. Once again Cameron uses super dynamics in his vocal changes that enhance the super lyrics that once again have a Passenger feel to them. John Chesher made a comment – “focus on the bass line” – but I’m not sure what he means by that? * Cameron’s third song was “*Catch Me As I Fall*” which he’d only written this year. More strumming like with capo and as usual a really tasty vocal tone. The depth of the lyric writing is amazing – “I’m scared I can have it all, and you won’t be there when I fall.” Lines like that



say so much with such. I had to go tune up John took over the reviews for Cameron's next song, "*Window Sill*": "Cameron has found a really good tonal sound for the guitar" – John is also a Fender Acoustasonic owner. "Cameron relies on a thumb that seems to know where its going. * I couldn't really discern the lyrics as well as I wanted to, but it is not a problem 'cause it's melody line carries it well making it very listenable." A great performance and many folks liked your material, Cameron, so I hope we hear from you again very soon. [Cameron Alcorn on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Gavin Fitzgerald: John also did the honours for Gav as well: "Neither here nor there", "*Living In Limboland*" "Are they going to be lovers, or friends, or continuously "Living in Limboland." Hanging in the misery of the I-don't-knows, lost in the pursuit of love – "I want...much." But its not what it seems. "I'm just living in Limboland." Yeap, a song at the beginning of a relationship where you don't know yet where you stand as you are neither in heaven, or hell, just Limboland. John thought Gav's next fingerpicked song, "*Fresh Flowers*" was a beautiful poem with the chorus of, "Would you put fresh flowers on my grave, should I die tonight." "Will you remember me" resolves into "Whatever will come, do this then be done." Then the chorus repeats as an outro. Then Gav delves into his influences with the Blues rocker, "*Sing The Blues*" which is getting loved and louder. Ya gotta get them out, so "Sing the blues." All the genres are okay, "But some days we all gotta song the Blues," in a repeated chorus.

Gav's last song was his classic, "*Coalface*" for which John wrote: "We love this classic "Gav" song. Everybody's nemesis that bloody coalface. Look for a carry out but in the meantime, "I'm here at the coalface." Unfortunately, the one we face isn't nearly as lucrative as those guys in the coal mine." Thanks, John, for the reviews and Ken for the photography. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Jocelin Chan: We swap the beast for the beauty as Jocelin steps up to the microphone. Whereas Gav is loud and brash, Jocelin is sweet and subtle in their performances, so a definite change in pace. Jocelin started off with "*Remember When?*" which has a superb melody with Jocelin's honeyed dulcet tones producing a superb delivery. Trying to jog the memory of a recalcitrant former crush which really tells you how they really felt about you – things like that can be soul destroying. You will leave wondering what you ever saw in the crush in the first place, a real reality check, but perfect material for a song! Remember, never piss off a songwriter, or you'll be lyrical cannon fodder! Jocelin and I have often discussed the problems with bureaucracy in our respective careers. We talked about how it seemed to be only about ticking boxes, which I have a half-written song about. However, Jocelin got in quicker to write her song, "*Tick The Boxes*" which is a brilliant take on the bureaucratic waltz when accessing government services and the like. A ballad of inefficient form filling – "We tick the boxes, and they'll be gone." I like the occasional slow downs to emphasise points as we "tick the boxes and all our dreams will be gone.



I think nearly everyone empathises with this song! Jocelin then announced it was the turn of her pharmacist's ballad, "*More Than Just A Drug Dealer*". All the imagery of a pharmacist's daily life from dealing with crying babies to those with mental health issues, trying to understand doctor's scripts with the then required checks - it's all in the daily grind, but not in a mortar & pestle. All driven with some impassioned strumming as Jocelin sings every word from her experiences. Jocelin's last song also delves into the pharmacological dispensing book for the song, "*My Heart Skips A Beat When I See You*", which is a definite chemist's love song as it mentions various medicines that can affect heart rate all to a great melody. So, a lot of fun for those in the know and a great song for those that aren't. Once again Joscelyn demonstrates that good songwriting is alive and well in Sydney. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Jae Magsipoc: After a bit of fold back organising, helped by Ken, Jae got the show on the road with his trusty acoustic and the song, "*Reaching Highest*". Featuring a strong vocal and intense strumming the melody shines out from the capoed guitar. I like the falsetto chorus and how Jae uses his dynamics in the song. I especially liked the phrasing Jae uses in this song as it has shades of the Talking Heads in it. After a bit of a lyrical shuffle we then got into "*If We Forgive*" with its repeated word verses that work really well as its very catchy. The chorus vocal dynamics are really interesting as we jump from normal voice to falsetto in the course of the delivery – quite a unique way of singing and makes the song even more interesting. Then Jae brought out his popular, "*Wanderers*" which Jocelin reviewed: "This song got John, Linda & Ken singing along to a very catchy chorus. Jae demonstrates a strong rhythm in his strumming." Once again Jae uses his vocal range to bring in tonal differences to help make the chorus catchy. The repetition of the chorus at the end really helps to embed the hook in the mind, especially after constant plays in concerts. Jae's last song of the night was "*Your*

Beautiful" with Jocelin once more in the reviewer's seat: "Jae has a very stylistic form of songwriting and singing. He always delivers a great rhythm and a good melody." I came back by this and thought that Jae uses his vocal range particularly well in this one, which I think Jae said was brand new. It's great to put your new songs out there as playing live is one of the best ways to test their validity. Another good set of songs from Jae tonight. [Jae Magsipoc on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



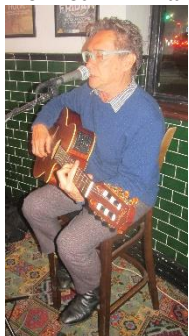
John Chesher: A man of much experience and many years has much that is worthwhile to say and the most



poignant things he has to say are put into songs. So, it's a wise person who listens well to what is singing to them. John hasn't earned his grey hairs for nothing. John started off with the Blues/Bluegrass feel of "*There Ain't No Show*". Starting off with some tasty leads noodling then launched into the song proper. I like the build to the chorus in this particular song. "Rain, oh rain, won't you fall on me." As usual it's full of John's intricate picking skills. I wasn't sure at the time if John deliberately played "*When You Go*", a song for a friend who passed away too soon, after he'd heard I was flying up to Ipswich the next day to say goodbye to my brother, Rick, who'd been given less than two weeks to live (He died a week later). John said at the end it was for my brother, Rick, as it really helped me on the night, so thanks mate I appreciated the song even more. This song has a lot of emotion in it as we've all lost someone important to us too soon and the lyrics convey the feeling so well – "May you walk in starlight." The song fitted my mood so well tears were threatening to avalanche, but I pulled myself together. John did another tuning fiddle to Drop D – "drop dead" said Ken with a cheeky smile on his face. Then we were in for a "*New Found Freedom (For Karen)*" which was more up tempo and brightened everyone's mood. "She turned herself around" in a story about how life can kick you down and it takes courage to pick yourself up but when you do it's liberating. It's the old saying, "Anything that don't kill ya makes ya stronger." This is all done to some really fluid picking of which John is the extreme master. John prefaced his last song, "*Why Me?*" with the question about how much is a heartbeat? People pay out fortunes to keep them going. So, you with 100,000 beats a day are not poor! However, some people still cry "why me?" so John turned this cry into a humorous song in the life of a pessimist where everything that can go wrong does, from robberies to premature expectations. This is all done to fiddle friendly style of playing. As usual a great performance tonight, John, so everyone who is a regular looks forward to your turn to perform. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section. – sorry, John, we did have a technological issue and missed part of the first song. Yeap, someone knocked the camera over.



Kenneth D'Aran: Not something I run into often, but Ken has written a song called, "*I'm Bored Out Of My Mind*" from a time when he turned adversity into productivity. There's an almost Egyptian tone to the song. I can imagine a Pharaoh sitting on his throne singing this one – watch out slaves! The Pharaoh wants to go water skiing! Only Ken could turn something so mundane into a great sounding song. Then we go into a Spanish-Arabic feel of "*The Luthiers Song*". There's many different perspectives in this one and I'm not sure it has to do with guitar making – "I love you with your nylons on." The drone style of singing has a very Moorish feel to it, with the sand whipped wind, the cries of Golden Jackals, and haunting tales around a firelight – are they also making guitars as a sideline?? Ken has a positive mind set so it's no surprise he writes songs like, "*This Day*", about a Winter's Day with all the associated imagery. He celebrates how good the season can be – "A really good idea not to go outside today". So, like recent Sydney weather a "grey, rainy day." These are the days where you want to stay inside with the heater on, curl up with a good book, or cuddle someone special which changes your perspective around – "It's a nice day today." Atmospheric in a fun, frolicking way – maybe



in front of the fire? I like the premise of Ken's last song, "*While I Still Have Wings*", while is about still wanting to do things as you are getting older. The song has a sea shanty feel while Ken sings to the song's main riff. Then there are interesting chordal changes – "What possibly could go wrong?" which I like that Ken answers, "Everything!" Alas, there are many things I wish I could have done when I was younger as it's nigh on impossible i.e., they don't recommend bungee jumping for anyone over thirty, let alone sixty-five, too many bad back stories from older people that have done it. But, then again, having a fear of heights I've never really been inclined to want to bungee jump anyway. I remember when I jumped into the Antarctic waters and slept the night on land, a girl in our group who didn't do these things had a big regret syndrome when we disembarked backed in Ushuaia. I agree with Ken; you've got to do these things while you still have wings! No matter the age! A great set of songs that are both fun and thought provoking, Ken. [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section



Bill Loukas: Bill was the last act of the night and was backed up by Russell on slide guitar. Bill only did two songs, the first was "*Staring At The Moon*" (No, not the Bruno Mars one, this is an original) which has a hypnotic meditative Eagles like feel – "I was doing fine until I lost my mind over you. Russell's slide playing is very atmospheric giving the song a slight eerie tone. The rhythm had Ken tapping along, in fact a number of people were foot tapping to "something pretty smooth." In fact, Ken even started whistling along with the melody line. I love the role reversal at the end of the song wherein the girl who left him winds up staring at the Moon which the song's protagonist gets a new lover. A good, well-constructed song, Bill. His second song, "*Baby Doll*", was about a girlfriend who was smaller compared to Bill and had the crowd clapping along. There's a super guitar riff that powers the rhythm along. A superb hook that gives



the song a Sunnyboy's feel. Russell's slide takes no prisoners as well and cuts through well. There's the heartbreak, "If you see her will you send her home," and the last line has an Elvis tone, "I'd like to find and kiss my baby doll." Bill has a very stylised way of singing the actual "Baby doll" whose intonation certainly grabs the ear. A great mini set of songs, Bill, definitely well worth the wait till the end. A top way to finish off the August Society Concert. [Bill Loukas on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section



