Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 10/08/26
2nd 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 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 10th of August there were seven players booked with mostly original songs in their set. It was another quiet Winter's night with the winds of August rattling the leaves of the tree encouraging people to stay at home in front of the fire.

For attending songwriters, the Society Concert is an excellent time to hear to how others approach songwriting, become inspired, all the while socialising and networking to find out what's happening in the world of songwriting. Many songwriters come along just for that and don't actually play. Could you be one of them?



There were many talented songwriters playing on the night and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he knew: "And thanks to Linda Chesher, Jae Magsipoc, Illya Szwec, 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.

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. Go to the new SSA (Songwriting Society of Australia) site at https://songwritingsociety.com.au/ to read the reviews and join the membership.

Russell was on the mark again with his P.A, sound engineering and MCing of the night. So, when the P.A was doing its thing then the first act of the night, Paul Li ventured in.



Paul Li: Paul seems to favour covers as I know he does a lot of busking. However, his own material is so much better than the material he busks. He did two covers tonight, but his original *"Vagabond"* really outshone the covers. Starting off with an amazing droning riff and sung in Paul's native Chinese it merges into soft down strums for the verses. I like the melody and chordal interchange in this song. Then there's a great lift to the chorus. Although in Chinese it really works well. The song drops back to the verse before hitting that super chorus again – really catchy even though in a different language. The song ends with a Radiohead style of picking. The only pity about Paul's performance tonight is he only played one original. Paul Li on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section

John Chesher: John once again started with the new song he wrote with Al Crew called *"Particles"*. The song starts wi5h a gentle ripple stream of riffs. Has a living in sunshine New Age essence. We are all particles in the Universe and are made of particles – "One for all, all for one particles." I think this is a song wherein John likes a word's phrasing so uses it a lot. This was followed by one of John's classics, *"Harbinger"*, which I definitely know John wrote because he liked the word's phrasing. The song starts with fast Bluegrass picking and John shows a lot of guitar flash. Then the dramatic tones of the lyrics caste their fore warning. This piece features so many great riffs that I wonder if John had a compendium of riffs and decided to put them all into this one? After the eeriness of *"Harbinger"* we venture further into the world of eerie things with *"Circles Around The Moon"*. Written after a devastating tragedy from John's youth. The atmospheric picking with touches of both Bluegrass and ragtime that soars like a zephyr winding its way around memories – what was, was once. "Angie, here's a song for you>" Grief can get you to write such great emotional songs – there's so much passion wrapped up in this one. The line, "Jesus, let her sleep in peace" always almost makes me weep as its so sincere and heartfelt. The haunting outro as he calls her name never more. Then John takes us onto another more light-hearted path as he plays, *"A New Found Freedom For Karen"*. Written for a friend going through a relationship breakup the song details how past the grief there is a wide avenue of new possibilities to explore. Life doesn't end with a relationship finishing. It's the opening of a new door, a new chapter, which could be even better. John captures this feeling well in this song. A great set of songs to keep the night rolling, John. John Chesher on Stage – John Chesher on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.





Gav Fitzgerald: I'd like to thank Al Crew for the reviews and John Chesher for the photography of my performance. I like getting Al to write up my reviews as he always has interesting ways of looking at my music. For the song, *"Hey, Mr Executive"* which was influenced by the extremely high salaries that some high-level executives get. Al wrote: "A rocking comment on how the easiest decision an executive makes in this day, and age is to approve their own pay rises. To the point lyrics and powerful riffs." Gav's second song was *"Wolf At The Door"*, which was written about a past girlfriend's ex who was still hanging around. Al mused: "A driving rhythm guitar is the perfect backing for another one of Gav's strong, intrusive lyric centred songs. Extra points given for the excellent "howling" climax." Gav's third





song, *"6.30"*, which is on his recently released album *"To Travel On"*, came from a weird chorus and a memory of a Kings Cross crime from years ago. Al noted: "One thing about Gav's songs is the central idea is always front and centre. And it's a very nice listener involving a monologue that distinguishes itself in this arrangement." Gav's last song was a recent one called *"Judas Kisses"* about a relationship breakup and how it played out. It prompted Al to write: "The song has a lovely little guitar intro – am I detecting a touch of country twang? Lyrically a somewhat more poignant and tender storyline but still retaining the Gav "Knock down the walls" vocals." Thanks again Al, for the kind words, and to John for the photos much appreciated. Gav Fitzgerald on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section. Gav's website is at **Gavsta60.com**

Al Crew & Russell Neal: I don't know of anyone who doesn't like when the boys get up to strut their songwriting and performing



stuff. It is always so sing along and catchy its worth coming along to a Society Concert night to catch these two in action! The regulars have heard a lot of their classics so when they start off with the incredible *"I Don't Love You Anymore"* the audience's vocal cords are harmonising. Full of tasty Russell riffs and superb lyrics about love after a breakup. I know the feeling so lines like "I don't love you anymore, but I don't love you any less" ring so true with the journey I'm on. That's the thing about Al's lyrics they are straight from the heart and full of meaning. The second song of the night is one of my absolute favourites of the duo's work and that is the mighty *"Jesus Whiskey"*. The protagonist of the song is in a dilemma with his misery, he's trying to decide who to turn to help ease the pain, Jesus or whiskey. However, he says "I named my whiskey Jesus, bottle and soul." The performance features Russell doing some amazing slide riffs, especially that little one that accompanies the chorus: "Jesus Whiskey, two birds, one stone." The strong crowd chorus would wake up the neighbours it was so loud and strong with this one. Then we have the positive laid-back feel of *"La De Da De Da"* which has a kinship with *"Don't Worry Be Happy"* in that the main line apart from the chorus is "It'll work out eventually." One of the best lines in the song is "A bird in the hand is better than a poke in the eye", a interesting mix of idioms. Mixing idioms is a masterclass in songwriting and has resulted in major hit songs e.g. *"Stop, In The Name Of Love"*, or *"I Second That Emotion"*. Al has always been a clever songsmith that uses these tricks to catch the audience's ears – "the scratch that itches"! The vocal riff of "La de da de da, la de da da da" is such a great ear worm. They guys weren't sure what to play next, so I yelled out my second favourite song, *"Mexico"*. I like this one so much as I've been to Mexico and had a great time. As well, the story is so dramatic as the protagonist is trying to escape a crazy wife, but the chorus is so laid back and bouncy. Kind of like *"Hey Joe"* but in reverse as he's trying to get away. Makes me want to order some mezcal from Oaxaca and eat the worm! None of that tequila rubbish! "Mexico, oh Mexico, you'll never ever know, if you never ever go." I've been and I agree! One always feels refreshed after a great set of songs from such talented artists, so great work guys – "grito Mexicano!" Al Crew & Russell Neal on Stage – The last three songs video is available for members in the Member's Section. Sorry guys I forgot to turn on the camera.



Ken D'Aran: Ken must be the most laid-back, affable gentleman of the Society. Even being fashionably late is de rigueur for Ken



as he strolls in with a whiskey in hand and a guitar in the other and that constant Cheshire cat smile. He carries this same energy onto stage with him, which makes his first song, *"Critical Thinking"* even more intriguing. Starting off with some ice crystal picking on the Crafter the song then blossoms into some superb introspective lyrics. A relatively new song from Ken this song, and its performance, demonstrates his talents in presenting ideas that tend to be left of centre. There are still tendrils of cold in the air so *"Winter Sun"*, with its jazzy, choppy rhythm still makes sensory sense. Ken uses an almost psychedelic chording that's both light and airy under the melodic shifts. There is a 12-string essence with Pete Townsend like upper chordal voicings. Ken then started on *"City Easter Music"* which prompted someone to say, "Not C & W!" But this was country music, Ken style, which owes more to *"Oklahoma"* if anything. Unfortunately, the wheel fell off the buggy - maybe *"The Surrey with the Fringe on Top"* – and Ken couldn't complete the song. So, he scrapped that one and went for one of his classics, *"About Time"*, which is the first song Ken ever wrote. It has such a great hook line of "About time I wrote me a song" with its infectious melody. The song has a bluesy feel with a touch of soul. "The vocal scat is great" someone said to me. Such a brilliant melody, its one of Ken's best. The song morphs into a great jazz impromptu before sliding back into the Blues. The outro has such interesting changes in it. I once suggested to Ken he should write some reggae, he tried, and failed miserably, but came up with one of his greatest songs! *"To Be Or Not To Be"* is a male dilemma about facial hair all done to a super chordal stutter riff. So catchy on the electric – "To cut it off…shave it back." Another song with a very strong melody, sometimes its almost operatic in a humorous way. Another reason to stay at the Society Concerts till the end as you have such great performers like Ken near the end. Ken D'Aran on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



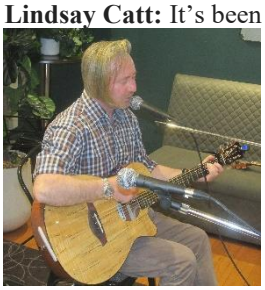


Russell Neal: Russell started with one of his late brother, Terry's, songs called *"Spell On Me"*. The song has a great melody, but also a dark energy. The higher string chordal riff is a real earworm. We all have down days like this - I was having one at the time of writing. A song about depression and how it can feel like you are under an evil spell. Then Russell kicks in with one of his more upbeat tunes, *"There Goes My Baby"*. Sounding like it has a Cat Steven's vibe it's the story about a couple he knows where the woman works, and her partner is a house husband – "See her pretty face in the marketplace." A song about the woman being the breadwinner and Russell's thoughts on this. I like the middle eight's change into an



almost do-wop 50's style vocal. Such a brilliant chorus that leads into "Bringing it all back to me." Definitely not a song about pimps and their ladies! Russell's next song was "dedicated to a friend" called *"Trish"*. Trish is a mutual friend of mine and they met through knowing me. It's the ballad of a close relationship, the start of joy and hope, the middle phase then the inevitable end with a verse for each. "You didn't care we lost the car", says so much with so few words. In the beginning lovers ignore mistakes, but that changes as relationships change. "You finally let me off the hook" is as succinct a way of saying the joined emotions split. The sadness of any love is that one day it will end or change. Russell ended off with the crowd favourite, *"Mr Hardway"*, with its great starting chord a la Chuck Berry's *"School Days"*. Even though the protagonist likes doing everything the hard way the audience harmonises with "It ain't no crime" cause he'll "take the hard way every time." This song has absurdist humour which makes it so great from three legged chickens to having sex standing up in a canoe. For the uninitiated there's laughter, for those who've heard it many times there the sing along chorus where all join in. The solo features a great chordal riff that keeps the rhythm going. Once again, a super set from Russell. Russell Neal on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

Lindsay Catt: It's been a while since Lindsay has graced the Society stage. I think it was back in The Fat Angel days. Starting off



with *"Haunting"* an exploratory piece of songwriting using a capo. There's a languid start with drone intension which give it a different ambience. There's a rolling sea motion which makes you feel you are on a yacht. However, a storm approaches as the seas build throughout the song. There's a slight Indian raga taste, but with rock energy that has a lot of passion in the depths – a bit like The Tea Party. Then again, I think of Celtic Enya meeting Led Zepplin with cascading notes – the open tunings allow Lindsay to explore the sonic variety at his fingertips. A touch of the classic Chinese song, *"Tu-Ning"* then we are *"Drawn"* into the second song. Vibrant ringing tones from the new tuning while the vocals act as the accompanying drone. I like the dynamics of how the bass cuts in as its both mesmerising and hypnotic. Then there is a chord solo that has more an Arabic overtone while the outro is lighter with folk intentions. Lindsay borrowed Russell's slide for *"Blue & Sore"* with its deep Devil's growl vocal. This song has a fluid, Bluesy feel, especially with the open tunings. Lindsay uses percussive taps on the guitar which help drive the rhythm. "Want to keep on drinking alcohol" – I agree! – "Can't take it no more". There's a pause then a cooking, fast slide riff wind a great up-tempo drive. The song goes crazy at the end, slows down, then goes full on till the end – high energy! Lindsay's last composition for the night for *"Independent"*, a Celtic instrumental in which you can feel the beat. It has a Give-me-a-Kilkenny-in a pub-in-Sligo feeling. There are tasty changes in dynamics with a super Irish riff that would get the lads & lasses up dancing. Such a super performance from Lindsay we hope to hear him up on the Society stage again soon. Lindsay Catt on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Others on the night played covers after the official Society Concert night finished. However, Gav Fitzgerald, held the songwriter's flag high to finish the night with originals:

Gav Fitzgerald Part 2: Gav had had a few so was quite relaxed when he took to the stage again. This gave all of his songs a certain Rolling Stones swagger. Gav started with *"The River"* which is a classic from his Velvet Road days (On his *"Another"* album). The blues riffs abound, and a story of extreme grief grips the microphone – not a true story but one where Gav channelled



his family's loss into a fictional blues ballad. Gav's voice is a little raspy tonight so a little Keith Richard in delivery. Next up was *"Dry Drought Road"*, which was written from Gav's childhood experiences of living through the intense 60's drought on a property. As Gav said, "This is country music as if written by Jack White". It's available on Gav's new album *"To Travel On"* which has only just come out. Gav tries to simulate the distances in the vast treeless savannah he grew up in with a clear ringing riff, then the relentless chugg of the heat and dust starts. The song builds like the stress of trying to cope with drought time. Then it's time to revisit another Velvet Road classic, *"Walk Right Back"* a song of jealousy and deception – another fictional piece. This one is available on Gav's *"Road"* album. Laid back with talking verses that lead to the aggressive chorus. The protagonist sees all of the hints of an unfaithful lover who keeps coming back saying she loves him. The audience at the end appreciated Gav's extra contribution to the night's entertainment. Gav Fitzgerald Part 2 on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section