

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 08/12/25

2nd Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The October **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) now 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 8th of November there were fourteen players booked with ten 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 John, Jo, Michael, 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.

Jocelin and 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 the ball with his P.A work, sound engineering and MCing of the night. So, the P.A was humming when the first act of the night, Sparkle, was asked up to the stage.

Sparkle: Sparkle loves to get to the open mics really early so she can play early. That way she has a fresh, vibrant delivery of her music and can catch the early bus home. Then into a bit of emotional horticulture with the "*Garden Of Love*". A song about Sparkle's grandmother's garden of roses. A picked song with a 18th Century style melody which is quite intriguing. "People love my garden". Reminds me of a folk enchantment. Second cab off the rank was "*You! You! You!*" which had a very strong melody and a great use of repetition. The verses go operatic with a falsetto style before they came back to the chorus which is very catchy and memorable. This makes a great juxtaposition between the sections of the song which piques the ear's interest. Last song of the set was a "*World Full Of Dreams*" which, once again, featured delicate picked guitar. The song's atmosphere is like being in balloon looking high over the Earth. The performance had Jocelin counter singing with the chorus melody. There's a certain captivating spirit to this song that's both mysterious and intense. Sparkle has once again put up a trio of talented songwriting.



Jocelin Chan: Jocelin always has a youthful energy emanating from her performance, full of the verve of being alive and delivered with gusto. Starting off with the ultimate song of nostalgia, "*Every Time I Think About Home*" Jocelin sings about her hometown of Hong Kong. Reminiscence reigns supreme in this musical narrative. The chorus is very strong; a real ear worm it's so catchy. Such powerful imagery of a place that haunts Jocelin's soul and guides her actions like everyone influenced by where they grew up. If you live far from your origins this song is for you, that wishful memory of a place that changed so much while you are away. Dwell in the warmth of past experience viewed through amber coloured glasses. The frustration with dealing with bureaucracy, its inefficiency and incompetence comes out strongly in "*Tick The Boxes*". Songs like these are important in the fight against corporate idealism which requires box ticking to work. As invalid as Centralisation in real world situations someone always thinks it's good idea, but so many fall through the valley wide cracks in the system. This song was done with a claw hammer technique that creates a bouncy waltz rhythm. This makes the song even more effective as it's less preacher like, but more observational: "She didn't fill in the form", "Let's tick the boxes to satisfy the bureaucrats." With Jocelin's brilliant vocal and very memorable melody we have standard bearer for those obstructed by officialdom. Jocelin then added the edge of humour with her song, "*More Than Just A Drug Dealer*" which details all the life of a pharmacist. Drawn from Jocelin's own work experiences the song has all the imagery of dealing with the range of humanity, from crying babies to obnoxious customers, to late medicine deliveries, etc, etc. All these colourful characters are delivered with a heavy strum and a passionate vocal. The lyrics are so effective, "All these drug names like Harry Potter spells", especially with Jocelin's vocal tones – she always has an extreme handle on the melodies. "They think it is easy to stick a label on but honestly, it's a four-year degree." Jocelin is a class act, with stunning songs, such as to what she presented tonight. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Gav Fitzgerald: Thank you to Al Crew for the write ups and to Jocelin Chan for the photography. Gav started off with his Harley D & The Professor/Velvet Road classic, "*Cold Outside*". Al surmised the song's performance as: "Chug-a-lug, the song has a nice guitar intro leading into strong vocals and a powerful story line. "The wind whistles through my hair." The song has very descriptive up close and personal descriptive lyrics." Gav's second song about getting used in love, "*Public Convenience*" with its hook chorus of "I ain't no public convenience, where you go for love and walk away." Al wrote for this one, "The song is slightly country tinged with a dash of Tex Mex tabasco. Catchy, sing along lyrics backed by an up-tempo beat. Gav has a clever use of words in his lyrics." A fairly prophetic song, "*Beauty Always Burns*" was written after Gav and Jocelin broke up very early in their relationship due to the age difference before coming back together or the next six years. Al noted that the song has a "Very effective hook and the integrated words make their point → you can't miss the point this song is making!" Russell was nowhere around so Gav improvised the song, "*Where Is Russell?*" till he appeared from the bathroom. Al even wrote about this bit of comedy: "A perfect example of the songwriting adage: "Write what you know about.") Thanks again Al for the review insights and to Jocelin for her keen eye on the camera. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Al Crew: If Al is the Cisco Kid, then Russell is definitely Pancho. They fit together musically like pieces in a puzzle that make absolute perfect sense. Al's laid back vocal and brilliant songs are wonderfully backed by Russell's superbly song paired riffs and harmonies. Like a great red wine with a mature tasty cheese! Each one separately is good but together they are magic, like Al and Russell's performances. Starting off with the infectious, "*Baby, Baby I Love You.*", which is led by Russell's ear worm lead bass riff. Such a hooky 50's style chorus that its nearly impossible to forget. Then that repetitive riff from Russell that's a extreme brain anchor. Second volley from the songship, Crew, is one of my personal favourites, called "*Jesus Whiskey*". Once again, the starting riff from Russell grabs the ear attention like a musical vice. "I love this song" said Jocelin. Should I choose Jesus, or whiskey, to solve my problems? Al's solution "I named my whiskey, Jesus – bottle and soul." Russell adds these sharp, tasty slide riffs that give a blues tone to the proceedings. Such a brilliant chorus that everyone sings along on first listen, "Jesus whiskey, two birds one stone." A quandary satisfied in the best possible way. Then we head into Al's realm of speciality, poignant country blues with "*Is There Another Word For Lonesome*" which once again started with Russell, but this time with some slide work that sounded very lap steel, so extremely appropriate for the genre. The Al does the full-on C & W lament, "There's whiskey on the table where there used to be love." Al's voice breaks with the emotion, while Russell rolls with the bass vocals harmonies, "I never want to be lonesome again," "Whiskey, oh whiskey." I truly know that empty, hole in the heart, feeling where the pain is only slightly eased by that amber fluid that mixes with the teardrops of memory. It's a deep dark well that the muses hide their special waters of healing for all songwriters. Wow! If you've not heard Al and Russell perform you are missing out on a brilliant experience. [Al Crew on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Brian Ralston: It's been a long time since Society member Brian Ralston played the Society stage! I can't remember if it was in the Paddington RSL, or the Fat Angel days? However, it was truly great to Brian again playing full form. I think his starting song, "*We All Must Stand Together*" sounds like something someone in Minneapolis might be singing but is actually about standing in line in long queues, a modern in frustration. This song would stand well with Jocelin's "*Tick The Boxes*", with bureaucracy reigning supreme in its inefficiency and inept handling of large numbers of people. It's the financial wrangle, where they don't want to employ enough people to service the need. Greed is more important than coherent effectiveness, so the bureaucrats focus on cost-effective incompetence. Brian's song, "*Holding Court In King Street*", has such touching poignancy, similar to the classic "*Streets Of London*" (Ralph McTell · 1969), about the homeless people. Brian has created such a brilliant song with all the imagery of the ragtag homeless in King Street near where Brian used to work: "Streetlights start to flicker in the dark" in this ballad of the "wretched". Such a great juxtaposition between the pin-strip suited lawyers and the destitute scrabbling for cigarette ends. The down-and-out "huddle out of sight." The song is so strong that the audience quietened down to listen to every word as each held so much meaning. One of the best songs I've heard on this subject. A quick change of genre then we are rocking out to a "*Midlife Crisis*" in a minor key. Sounding a bit like Bob Seger's material, with the growly voice and kick arse rhythm. I like the "Ah ah ahhh" of the prechorus with a Bee Gees crow call that leads into the hook. Full of incredibly vivid lyrics detailing the struggles of a person going through a midlife crisis encounters: "Libido dragging on the ground." We haven't heard from Brian for quite a while, but it's so worth it to hear a master songsmith in full flight that we hope he comes along to more future Society concerts. [Brian Ralston on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Jacques Mario Gentil: Jacques is from Melbourne and has placed second in the recent SSA Awards so has the songwriting street cred already. His first song, “Zoomed & Doomed” was about that cheating couple caught on screen during a Coldplay concert. The song is meant to be in a similar style to Coldplay and Jacques has succeeded in this aim. “Oh, what a fall” with the imagery of the couple’s disgrace. The “Oh oh oh oh” is great chorus as it’s meant to emanate from the Coldplay crowd. Then on goes the capo and a folk like strum in “*Should Words Fail.*” Done in a soft rock style the song is about relationships where he’d given up and re-started. “I may not find the perfect girl”. There is a great melody behind the verses as the middle eight, or pre-chorus, lifts. “When the music fades away”. The song had Jocelin singing a counter refrain to a full, strong melody. “That was good, man” said Jocelin. Jacques only did two original songs but came around giving out good quality pens for his **Magesongs School of Songwriting** (magesongs.com). I haven’t had a look at this yet as I’ve been quite busy, but it might be a good idea to check it out.



John Givins: Russell introduced John as “the irrepressible Johnny G” who bounced out in full Christmas gear. Johnny G is always very seasonal with his songs and performances. Starting in more philosophical mode with the song, “*There Ain’t Many Christmases In My Life.*” Complete with faux electronic drums and bass Johnny G rocked this one out a bit in a minor key. The theme is that there a finite number of Christmases in a life. The first few and maybe the last few years may not really count. So, the general instruction is to make each one count. Johnny G had lost his own father, as an adult in 2008, not long before Christmas, (I hear you Johnny, as I lost my mother about a week before Christmas back in 2013), and wrote the sad Christmas song “*Bring Daddy Home For Christmas*” from the perspective of a little boy who’d lost his father. With melodramatic synth we have emotive lines like “Hey, come back, you are making Santa sad,” and the telling “I’d give up all my presents just to have him back.” Such a sad, sad weepy Christmas song: “Please come back, here in Santa’s sack.” You can feel the heartfelt tears streaming down the little boy’s cheeks as he prays as the imagery catches the emotion perfectly. Johnny G’s last song of the night was the humorous upbeat, “*Santa, He’s An Ocker*” with its Aussie flavoured take on Christmas driven by a great piano riff. From hot beach sands, to drinking with his mates, and getting into trouble with the misses it’s the quintessential Australian bloke being Santa. “He drives a beat-up Holden.” With his Panama hat set at an angle and his eyes having a cheeky grin Johnny G has delivered a super variety Christmas show on his own and taken the audience along for the ride. A great set, Mate. [John Givins on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Paul Connolly- We haven’t seen Paul for a while so it’s great to see him back on the Society stage doing his fantastic songs. Paul’s first song is currently more on my mind now and is called “*Used To Be So Free*”. The song has a start stop rhythm with lines like “I think about you occasionally.” All those memories of a past intense relationship that haunt you now and then. The grief, the anger, the acceptance and the fading afternoons of nostalgia. What ever happened to? “We used to be so free like the monkeys high up in the tree.” Alas, that is now dust blowing in the winds of yesteryear. Once was, was, but never more. Paul’s second song was a higher wired song about walking in the city on a Saturday night. Called “*Pretty City*” its rhythm kicks along like someone walking along a street. “Hey, yeah, let’s go cruisin’ tonight, in this pretty city.” You can feel the freshness of the vibe, the energy of possibilities and the air of excitement in every line. “Walking in the city feels so right, In this pretty city.” Paul’s last song was from when he visited San Francisco and went past a slum area. A lot of people idolise the US, but it tends to be a place that favours the rich and despises the poor. Paul was shocked by the living corpses, being eaten by flies in one area that he wrote “*Dirty Boulevard*”. With a super funky riff start that is excessively catchy then the “Dodo dodo du do du do dodo” which is a brilliant singalong section the crowd gets into. “Going down to the dirty boulevard of San Francisco.” A great song with such a strong message. Once again Paul has delivered with extras a superb set of hooky songs! [Paul Connolly on Stage.](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Ken D’Aran – If anyone could be counted as the Dean Martin of the Society it would be the master of cool jazz himself, Ken D’Aran. We are all getting older, no matter your age, so Ken’s song deals with those in the greyer part of the age spectrum with the song “*While I Still Have Wings*”. The verse melody is the same as the vocal melody so they harmonies together well. This gives the song a very Irish lilt before it expands into the lush chorus. A very catchy piece, both rhythmically and lyrically. Then one of Ken’s all-time classics that’s extremely relevant in today’s world with the Trump’s authoritarianism on the world stage. Yes, its “*Tangled Tango*” with its humorous bent on powerful men’s childish egos - “My gun is bigger than yours” – all done to a tango beat. Politics is a dance, and this takes all those who aren’t there for other people and puts them under the microscope. That first chord rings out a warning, “There’s a crisis going on, a crisis going on.” “It’s a hornet’s nest” then the super melody of the chorus, gun comparisons as “It’s a viper’s nest” Ken tells it like it really is, the power games of spoilt children. I really like the almost Lawrence of Arabia feel of the start of “*I’m Bored*”. So, dramatic with wide sweeping views, so maybe Lawrence of Disengagement might narrow the viewpoint. Even if you are “singing out of tune” it makes boredom enlivening. “An eye in the sky searching for more.” Such laid back enthusiasm for boredom! Once again Mr Cool has given us his variety of themes for our listening benefit. [Ken D’Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Russell Neal – Russell our esteemed MC and sound engineer came up on stage and asked what people wanted to hear as he had time for one song. The call out was for “*The Lady Loves Women*”. For those who came in late this is a song about discovering a past girlfriend has switched sides and “introduced me to her partner, Jane.” The humour comes from the singer’s memories of the girl in a previous relationship and the comparisons with her current situation. The crowd love to sing with this one and the inbuilt humour puts smiles on all the dials. A great way to end the December Society Concert, [Russell.](#)
[Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

