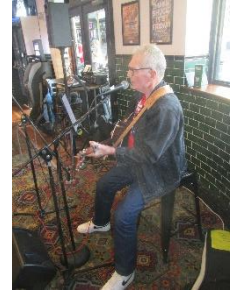


Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 10/02/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

John Wright – John started off the night with “*I’m Going Okay*” with its beautiful melody and lyrics detailing the emotions of unrequited love backed by some tastefully picked guitar. There is a Bread like feel, with their romantic style intentions – “You don’t feel the kiss because you’re gone forever.” There is so much passionate emotion in a simple line like that – “We’re not in love, you told me so” – yes, I’ve been in that self-same position many times myself where you feel one way and the other person doesn’t and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it except move on. The vocal “Oooohs” are very atmospheric, and the grief is palatable. “I’m going okay”, but in reality, you’re not, but it’s the only path you can take. Then we are into the downstroke strumming of “*Sugar & Salt*” with its light rock feel. Think New Wave with either Elvis Costello, or Joe Jackson in style. There is a great use of dynamics a la Rockpile, with lyrics worthy of either Dave Edmunds, or Nick Lowe – “You’re the sugar in my world of salt”. Then John pulled a new one out of the box called “*Frayed Edge*” which had a romantic country style to it. So nicely picked one of the punters there for the game yelled to John, “Yeah, that’s really good!” I think John grabbed the audience’s attention because of the song’s strong melody over a tasty selection of chord changes. There’s a real “Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn” (Quote from the 1939 movie “*Gone With The Wind*”) feel about this song, when “beauty turns to grey.” John needs to record some of his original songs as they are so good, lyrically, melodically and performance wise. These would be his gifts to the future, however you can still hear his master performances at Society concerts.

[John Wright on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Sparkle – The lady with the sequins has come to charm us again with her original songs. Sparkle has that hippie heritage with a mid-1960’s jazz folk ambience. Starting off with one of the first songs she ever wrote called “*Shy Guy*”. There is a nice melodic folk delivery that is quite passionate. I’m not sure of the origins of this song, but there would be a story behind its creation. Is it wishful thinking, or an encouragement to the “shy guy”? One way, or another, there is a certain romantic yearning in the lyrics and the song’s musical theme. Hair is a funny material for humans as it has many uses but one of the most important is a scent and pheromone trap. Of course, the biggest scent and pheromone trap is the hair on the head. Every time you hug, or kiss someone you get a big dose of attractant chemicals. If the biochemicals match, then there’s “a match made in heaven.” Sparkle captures this feeling well in her song, “*My True Love’s Hair*.” Done in a claw hammer picking style the song has a 1930’s era folk feel. Sparkle really got into this one and the audience could feel with empathy. Those pheromones must have been 100% proof to influence you to write this song.

Sparkle’s last song of a strong set was “*What’s Done Is Done*” with its determined lyrics – “No use crying over spilt milk.” Once again Sparkle employs a claw hammer picking technique so that the song’s flavour is a 1920’s folk hillbilly type. The rhythm is so strong that people were nodding their heads in time. The song has a strong melody and a hypnotic delivery. A great performance tonight, Sparkle.



Gavin “Gav” Fitzgerald – I’d like to thank Al Crew for doing my reviews and I think it was Johnny G who did the photography. Al wrote the following about the old Velvet Road classic, “*Saturday Morning*” off their album, “*Saturday Morning*”: “The song “*Saturday Morning*” never sounded as powerful as it does feature the title of this up-tempo strum along. Energy and then some. A great song to listen to during the week to give you something to look forward too. As usual with Gav there is a very strong vocal and guitar. The audience is clapping even before the song is over. Gav’s second song, “*Wolf At The Door*” had Al musing: More strong vocals and guitar which fit perfectly with the lyrics – “There’s a wolf howling down the street.” If you ever need an act to wake up an audience, give Gav a call! “*Got A Foolish Heart*” had Al noting: “A little change of pace, or at least rhythm. A reggae influenced number named “*Got A Foolish Heart*”. Which is potent as that’s how a great number turn out to be – “I often wonder why, I drink to those memories again.” If you like your music strong and uncompromising then Gav’s your singer songwriter!” Many thanks for the kind reviews, Al, and the images Johnny G. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Axis – AKA Axel, Shining Axe, etc has had a few name changes of late however he still comes out with the same quality songwriting and performance. He did blot his copybook a little by starting out with a cover – this is a songwriter’s night after all. However, he redeemed himself with “*Sparkle Of Creation*”, an original with folk like intentions. You can tell Axis’ lyric writing is definitely Bob Dylan inspired as it has the same quality of storytelling depth and imagery. It’s great to hear Axis push the boundaries with his lateral thinking. On the night I’d written about Axis’ third, and original song, “*Do The Pain*”, as to whether this so was dedicated to exercise and increasing your fitness. Then again it could refer to anything in life i.e. you have to pay your dues, either before an achievement, or after. This song was picked in a folk fashion and has a great chorus reminding me of Donovan’s material, but with a minor feel. It’s great to hear such a talented songwriter display his wares on a songwriter’s stage. [Axis on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Paul Li – Paul is one of the most intriguing songwriter performers on Sydney’s open mic stages as he writes great songs but sings them in his native Mandarin. Even though you can’t understand the lyrics you can get the music and feelings produced. Starting off with the great “*The Most Romantic Thing*” Paul



has the guitar chugging away with a muted rhythm that reminds me in part of Paul Connolly’s material being very The Jam/New Wave in style but done in Chinese. I really like that central riff as its so memorable and cool. Such superb energy, especially with the added vocals. Paul’s performance suggests a whole band is playing. I like the dark starting riff to “*Vagabond*” which has a touch of Metallica in its energy. The verses then have a straight down rock approach and sung with a lot of passion. The excellent chorus is full on a la Chinese. I like the middle eight as it drops the dynamics down to finger picking before the song roars off again. The only downside of Paul’s performance is he only played two songs! [Paul Li on Stage](#) – The full video is

available for members in the Members Section.



Ilya Budovsky – A good Russian influence as Ilya left his homeland many years ago to start his life of freedom, and songwriting, in Australia. Alas, his first song was a cover, which wasn’t a good start on a Songwriter’s Night. However, Ilya compensated for this with the next two songs being originals, the first being “*Night Time With Silly Men*”. I’m not sure if the “silly men” he refers to have been imbibing too much but it’s done on an Ovation ukelele with a swing jazz feel. A song about a night on the town which sounds like a lot of fun. Ilya’s vocal prowess carries the melody well over the uke, which ranges across its chordal spectrum well. I think the audience particularly liked the “How wa wa hi” refrain. It really sounded like a super night on the town with a bunch of mates! “*We Can’t*” flummoxed me as I wasn’t sure what it was about. Is it a song about a naughty dalliance, or about breaking the rules to progress? One way, or another, the song features some great riffs on the uke.

Ilya even came into the audience for a walk around to show off his immense skills with a rhythm solo. The song’s drive reminds me of “*Hernando’s Hideaway*” which has a gypsy jazz feel. It’s great to hear Ilya add a different songwriting flavour with his talents. [Ilya Budovsky on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



John Cheshier – Ex-President of the SSA struts his stuff on the Society stage starting with the classic “*Room With No Door*” about long term relationship problems. The song features a superb melody and intriguing lyrics. There is a dynamic flow through the song’s ebbs and eddies just like the movement of emotions in long time relationships. The edges of happiness and despair well up in the comfort zone threatening to call down the walls of Jericho forever leaving grief strewn in the rubble of the aftermath. John seemed to be on a theme tonight as the breakup of that self-same relationship led to “*Not Just Any Old Monday*”. I was there on the Monday night Open Mic night at the Excelsior Hotel when John set songwriting homework for the regulars which was to write a song about “Mondays.” Some of us did accept the assignment and played them the following Monday. John Blitzkrieged everyone with this song while mine is somewhere in one of my song’s boxes. There is so much passion and real truth in the lyrics and the dynamics of the music – “Not saying its over, you’ll always be my friend”, which John follows at the end of the song with “But it is!” All the pain, the grief, the baggage that outpours from the wounded soul are laid out in this emphatic



song, one of John’s best. I’ve heard John’s song “*Circles Around The Moon*” also called “*Angelina*” which is such an impactful song as its about his girlfriend from back in his Canada days who decided to leap off a building when John couldn’t go out with her one weekend due to family commitments. Pure utter devastation is all I could say, and part of that emotional release was this song. Emotionally it reminds me of Crowded House’s “*Hole In The River*” as the grief is written with a feeling of lost belief in the future as the question asks “Why?” The heartfelt passion in lines like, “It wasn’t her lying there, she’s living in my head.” However, each plaintive “Angelina” at the end is like a knife stab to the very essence of humanity. Even though the song says he hopes she finds release, you know he never will for

his whole life. John went the relational journey tonight taking us down some dark paths, but like expunging bad spirits the actual singing of the songs grants a calmness to leave the past as the past. What a musical voyage both with the songwriting and the performance, John. [John Cheshier on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



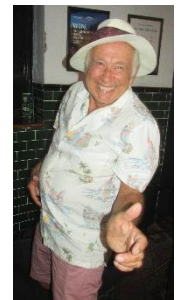
Bill Loukas – A songwriter who was new to me but well known to others in the crowd especially Russell who backed him on lead guitar. Bill started out with “*Staring At The Moon*” (Not the Bruno Mars song although having a similar theme) which featured a strong vocal and Russell’s leads singing out. The song has a great hook – “What can I do? I’m just staring at the moon.” Such a great song as we’ve all done that, stared at the moon wondering about the future and how we’ll progress – magic! From a wistful song about thoughts and dreaming to the full-on love lust of “*Baby Doll*”. Written about a former girlfriend of Bill’s who was only five foot two inches. Think of County & Western with a Punk delivery, maybe a more driven cowpunk. Russell’s guitar comes in with a Hawaiian slide feeling. The whole combination makes me think of Iggy Pop doing C & W. Especially with that great riff and the hooky chorus. Unfortunately, Bill’s last song was a cover, which we don’t cover in our reviews as it’s a songwriters night. However, Bill’s originals are so strong it’s a wonder he has to resort to covers? [Bill Loukas on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Ken D'Aran – The affable gentle man of the Society, Ken always has an experienced smile upon his face. A man of many adventures its these he calls into play with his songwriting. Ken's first foray into his musical mind is "*Running Around*" which has superb lyrics and a jazz-tinged content. Ken is always about to quieten the crowd with his cool jazz delivery as they hang on those complex chord changes and tasty lyrics. The song comes across as a cross between Leonard Cohen and Steve Harley. One of Ken's best songs, "*Tangled Tango*" which is about power, corruption and politics – "There's a crisis going on." All the egos and vanity of governments done to a tango beat which had Linda up and dancing. Such a great delivery! "My gun is bigger than yours" – it's the perfect line to sum up the song. The song has that Ken touch of humour, but with a deeper thinking message. This song is especially pertinent to today's world and the axis of evil, Putin, Xi Jinping and Trump. All have super egos, want to build empires and don't care who gets in their way. Ken's last song is a super song and really fun. "*About Time I Wrote Me A Song*" was the first song Ken ever wrote. It starts off with a stunning chordal introduction which is really catchy and delves into the rich vein of jazz blues. There is a scat section, which is first class, then rebounds back into that ever so catchy chorus that has everyone singing along. Tonight was definitely cooking with Ken and the banquet presented really grabbed the aural taste buds – not Master Chef, its Master Songwriter! [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



John Givins – With his Panama hat, cheeky smile and keyboards John turns into his alter ego, **Johnny G**. When Johnny G takes to the stage you know anything will happen, and it usually does! As it was only a few days to Valentine's Day Johnny pulled out his songs to celebrate the day being an old romantic. Starting off with "*Once A Year*" which has a Blues Do-wop feel and lines like "Your kisses are sincere." Johnny's amorous side comes out in full form backed by some interesting harmonies on the piano. Hopefully romance comes more once a year, Johnny! In the same Valentine's Day theme (Johnny's songs can be very seasonal.) was the next song, "*It's A Romantic Time*". Done as a folk ballad on piano the lyrics were a little hard to hear as there was a keyboard effect which was overpowering. The chorus of "It's a romantic time" came out strongly, but I've heard this song before, and the imagery of the lyrics are great for the song's central idea. Enough of mushy stuff as Johnny throws off the cloak of a lover to become a rock'n'roller with "*Went To The River*". I like the piano riff as it kicks along, and Johnny seems to be having a lot of fun with this one. Once again one of the keyboard effects seems to be working against the song making it hard to hear verse lyrics. However, I have heard this one before and the lyrics really suit the song's drive. Johnny's enthusiasm is infectious and overcomes technical difficulties – he always leaves a smile on your dial. [Johnny G on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Paul Connolly – One of my favourite writers now comes to the stage. Paul has that superb New Wave energy of a 60's feel and a 90's edge. This is very evident in his first song, "*If You Want To Call Me*", which is an extremely catchy tune. Such a super rhythm that turns up the stove heat. Is this simple entreaty in a relationship, or in business – that's for you to decide. If The Jam, Elvis Costello, or the like were putting out these songs they'd be major hits. Another example of how good a writer Paul is, is his next song, "*One Of Us Is Lying*" with its super rhythm. Such a great chorus, really full on – "One of us is lying, but I don't see the point." That line is so good at saying so much with so little. The whole scene is established and the relationship exposed in only a few words – brilliant songwriting! The song captured the audience and had Linda up dancing. Linda afterwards said, "That was great as its so catchy." Paul's last song, "*Monkeys High Up In The Tree*" also has a complexity of hidden meanings - "Used to be so free high up in the tree" Nostalgia reigns supreme in this song, a whimsical memory of a very passionate relationship that's far in the past. Once again Paul's rhythm is so cool that the girl behind me yelled out, "He's great!" Once again tonight Paul has dazzled the assembled crowd and made it his. [Paul Connolly on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Russell Neal – Its not every Society Concert that we get to hear Russel play his material as he can be so busy with running the P.A, being M.C, organiser and backing other artists. So, the audience was treated to a Russell end of Concert appearance. Starting off with his whimsical "*I Know Where I Want To Be*" which has a Medieval minstrel feel and great lines like "If wishes were horses." A song of unrequited love done with style where the protagonist is "sitting here by myself." Add to that the cool 15th Century meets 21st Century riffs and "You know how I feel." This song was written by Russell forty-one years ago and begs the question of whether his pursuit was ever successful? "Just give me tonight is all that I ask", brings forth King Henry the Eight imagery. There was a call out for "*There Goes My Baby*" and Russell complied with a song written about a friend whose girlfriend did all the work/money earning in the marketplace while his friend bludged at home. The song has a real Cat Stevens sing along feel which gets the audience singing the chorus loudly. "There goes my baby, she is something to see, there goes my baby, bringing it all back to me." The song has an upbeat feel but is actually Russell's criticism of his friend's actions and not about a pimp as people often interpret. Russell's comedy songs are always the crowd's favourites and tonight Russell issued forth one of his best, "*The Lady Loves Woman*". A song detailing meeting a past lover to be introduced to her new lesbian lover. The pair then ask if the protagonist could be the father of their child. However, how Russell outlines the meeting and subsequent interactions is sooo funny. When asked to father the child the character thinks "I'd get another chance to taste her, but then they said we have to use the turkey baster." One of the songs that always has the newbies in stitches and the regulars in full vocal chorus. A great way to end the February Songwriting Society Concert, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



The February **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 Monday night. On the SSA night on the 10th of February there were about twelve players on a hot humid, sweaty night with many, many people there to watch the US Super Bowl. A lot of people came to watch a game, but stayed



to listen to great, original music. As well, for songwriters, it's the perfect time to listen to how others approach the muse all the while socialising and networking. There was a wealth of talent on display and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he knew: "And thanks to Al Crew (sorry you couldn't stay to play), Lesley, Jack and Andrew, Linda, 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 as well.