

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 09/02/26
2nd Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

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) 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 9th of February there were eight players booked with all doing original songs in their set. Some even had another go at the end.

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 Jack Peck, 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.

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.



Like usual the food was great with me having the Aussie Burger which has onion rings to die for. I was feeling a bit down, and even the menu triggered me, as this was the first Society Concert without my partner Jocelin who decided to look for greener pastures. I'm forever grateful to Ken, Russell and Al for sitting with me so I felt less lonely.



There was no Sparkle due to the protests about the Israeli Prime Minister's visit. She was worried she might have trouble getting through the crowds. John and Linda were down in Young visiting friends.

Russell was on cooking with his P.A, sound engineering and MCing of the night. So, the P.A was ready when the first act of the night, Paul, was asked up to the stage.

Paul Li: Paul likes the starting spot so he can get off to an early start. The super riff of "*The Most Romantic Thing*" was the first hook to hit the airwaves for the night. Alongside a stunning vocal melody and brilliant dynamics, you don't have to understand the lyrics (In Mandarin) to appreciate how superb this song's writing actually is. It'll hook you in and you might even learn some foreign phrases as well that'll help you sing along. There's a touch of sadness to "*Passing By*" which really suited my mood. Done with a light percussive strum the Blues emotion had Al a tapping. The minor key helped get the message across well. Then Paul did a cover, which we don't cover in our reviews, or videos. [Paul Li on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's



Section.

Gav Fitzgerald: Thank you to Al Crew for the review and to Cameron Alcorn for the photos. Gav started off with his Velvet Road era classic, "*The River*" that was written at a Liz Scott Songwriting Workshop after the two gorgeous girls he'd written a funk song with had left for lunch. Al surmised the song: "'The River' has beautifully integrated little licks that are a feature of this song. They sit purposefully beneath Gav's powerhouse vocals and rhythm guitar. "*Freedom*" is a song used to play a lot a while back, so it was great to give it some air again with Al musing: "I call this one intelligentsia rock i.e. AR. There's a signature driving guitar accompanying strong, well thought out meaningful lyrics." Gav's said his last song, "*Save Me*" was written from his observations that the small things we say to others, or do for others can have vast impacts. Al viewed the song's performance as: "A cry for more hard-arsed rock'n'roll???" Expertly crafted and delivered. AS original as another reason why guitars remain the world's most popular instrument." As there were fewer acts



tonight each act was given four songs. Gav's fourth song was "*Out Of My Head*" which is a country person's view about living in a big city. Al wrote for this one: "The song has a little jazzy intro which leads to a heavier vocal execution which works well. No going out to the pub, restaurant or theatre when Gav goes out, he goes out of his head – hope he has a reservation!" Thanks, Al and Thanks Cameron for your help with my review. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section

Cameron Alcorn: Cameron is the super soul master of the Sydney open mic nights with a vocal tone that amazes people who hear it. Cameron started off with *"Understanding"* which had superb lyrical phrasing and a pensive tone that emphasised Cameron's stunning vocal abilities. A song that was short but delivered big time on its emotional base. Then Cameron performed one of his classic pieces, *"What If Life Was Contrived"*, that started with light strumming before the superb use of vocal flavours knocked it out of the cricket pitch. Then the hook line of the chorus is brilliant as is the lead in dynamic change – "Just for a second". An emotion so passionate that everyone felt it like a surge of heartfelt adrenaline traveling through your mind. Then like a fighter's classic, "One, two" we are hit in our ears by another superb delivery of the song, *"Windows"*. Wow! This was a request from Paul Li, and you can tell why as this song is so persuasive, and Cameron sings it so well in his unique soul style. With drone like verses and a super lift to the chorus – "I've been waiting my whole life". This is a definite love song for someone special and if it became a hit single would be played at many weddings! Cameron's last song was *"I Just Want You"* which again had magnificent phrasing and tone, stunning in fact. Once again, the change to the chorus is fantastic with a clever use of dynamics – such a catchy chorus! If you haven't heard Cameron perform his material, you are in for a treat as it is always amazing. [Cameron Alcorn on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



Steve T Walker: Steve is a visitor from Queensland who brought a few people along, borrowed a guitar and regaled us with a couple of originals. Half his set and his second set were covers, so we can only review the first two from his original set. Starting out with a song that totally suited my mood, *"If You Love Someone Let Them Go."* Played with a lightly picked strum with lines like "If loves not meant to be, it's the only way to go." It's the sound of many broken hearts after the other in the relationship tells you it's time for them to move on whatever the reason. The song's feel has a great soul intention, and I like the falsetto change as it adds to the dynamics. I'd say Steve has been down the heart break path as his second original is *"Loneliness Remembers"*, which had a nice intro. Steve definitely has a superb tone in his voice that suits his material well. The rhythm had Al tapping away in tempo. A great chorus of: "Once there was a heart, now there's stone." Even Ken got into it clapping along. Alas, Steve was flying back to Queensland the next day I think with his friends, but he'd be welcome back to the Society stage to sing his originals if he's ever in Sydney again. [Steve T Walker on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



Rusty Tempo: Rusty is another newbie to the Society stage and played a set only of his own material – good man! Playing a tasty sounding Cole Clark acoustic Rusty launched into *"When Trixie Lee Left Town"* which was strummed country style and lines like, "Got to go." The Middle eight had an Arabic feel – "I wish you anything." This isn't your usual country music, probably landing in the alternative country pigeonhole. However, Rusty does this genre well. His second song was *"Her Eyes"*, which was done in a minor feel. I like how each line go "Her eyes are..." has a different characteristic and a different part of the girl's personality. For example, "Her eyes are blue" leads into "You might have earned some wisdom," while "Her eyes are steel" leads into "She's so damn cruel." It's like you traverse the whole spectrum of the relationship that ends with "Ain't it sad." It seems a lot of songs fit right into my personal mood tonight! Maybe I need to travel down the pathway of Rusty's next song, *"The Back Of Your Face."* This song had lines like, "It's better to see the back of your face," or "Thought you held me up but you tore me down." But you can hear the grief at the ending of the relationship with lines like "Take me in your arms like before." Is this nostalgia balanced against reality? I think the general themes of Rusty's material is of the spurned paramour as his last song, *"The Other Side Of Mourning,"* seems to travel down that road. It has a funny rhythm, almost ¾ but in a 4/4 setting which seems to suggest a Celtic influence. Intriguing lines like "Run to the left side, slide to the right, we all fall down." That does sound like the roller coaster of grief the ending of a relationship brings. A really great song to end your set, Rusty, I hope you grace the Society stage again soon. [Rusty Tempo on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



Al Crew & Russell Neal: It's great to see and hear the dynamic duo in action again. Al writes such amazingly catchy songs, while Russell comes up with such tasty licks along with super harmonies that lift the performance into another realm. The pair's first song was the classic, *"Is There Another Word For Lonesome"*, which really hit the spot with me as I was really missing Jocelin's presence – I should have been drinking whiskey not Balter XPA! Al's lyrics are so descriptive, "There's a setting for one when there used to be two," or "There's whiskey when there used to be none." Such, sad, sad imagery which feels like my immediate destiny. "Sometimes I hear voices when nobody's there," or "Nothing but silence where laughter once was." Yeap, this captures the hole felt when somebody important leaves your life – the epitome of grief distilled into a song, especially one so sing along. This is Al's songwriting ability to capture those personal moments and make them achingly beautiful, especially the sad ones. Thank God the pair went off on a different tangent with *"Mexico, Oh Mexico"*! I've been to Mexico (Along with Belise and Guatemala) so this song always brings back a lot of joyful memories. Starting off with a super memorable riff the lines tell the story, "Left a fine house and an angry wife" – shades of *"Way Out West"* by The Dingoes. However, this rhythm is almost reggae with a definite Caribbean feel – maybe it's time to break out some of the dark sweet rum from that region!



Then a super solo from Russell in an escapist dance song that has every audience singing lustily along. I know the background of *"This Is The End Of It"* and it involves finishing a doner kebab. However, Al added to the initial idea with that passion of relationships changing. The line "I sometimes whistle Dixie" set Ken off whistling while Russell came out with such a persuasive soul riff that perfectly complimented the song. I started down the morose slide again until Al announced my absolute favourite of the pair's material and it's a fairly recent one. *"Jesus Whiskey"* has fast become a favourite of anyone who has heard it. The lyrical premise is that someone feels they need help either Jesus, or from whiskey, so calls their whiskey Jesus – "Two birds one stone." As well, there is an absolute cracker of a riff from Russell. "Set 'em up bartender, let the soul go free." As its "Jesus whiskey, bottle and soul." A real rip-roaring chorus that always has the crowd singing loudly in fine form. Really, Al & Russell have to get an album of their joint work out there as this one is an absolute killer! Whenever Al & Russell take to the stage there is always a palatable edge of excitement as you know it will be a great shoe like tonight was! [Al Crew & Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



Ken D'Aran: Who could follow the performance powerhouse of Al Crew & Russell Neal?? Only one person I know if the laid-back affable Ken D'Aran who asked us all to *"Listen."* This song features some nice double stop start rhythms – "spinning around with my face off the ground" – all done in a minor jazz feel Ken even incorporated "Goodnight, Al" into the song as Al Crew made his exit. A song in the round style that was very nicely picked. The song has a humorous twist as its about not having any lyrics. This was followed by the Ken classic, *"This Day"* AKA *"Winter's Day"* which is jammed packed with all the imagery of having a lazy day at home on a cold, blustery day. There's warm fires, sunlight streaming, a feeling of coziness – interesting as the sweat rolls down my back as the air conditioning must be playing up again. I like the jazz inflections of this song. Then we delved into the traps of *"The Comfort Zone"* a place we all like to retreat to, especially when times are tough. This song is a celebration of all the things that make us feel good. Such a great song investigating our inner most desires – that soft pillow, that form fitting chair,



that sofa you can put your feet up on – whatever gives you comfort this is the song. Then the middle eight takes us away from "too much confusion." As Ken was playing this song there was a profusion of sirens and helicopters as I'd say the Israeli Prime Minister arrived nearby – definitely "too much confusion." What is the most valuable thing we all have? Its time! We have a finite time on this planet to do all the things we want to do, and we trade it off for minimal cash – a necessary but sad fact of life. Ken tackles the question of time in *"Time Bossa"* with its laid-back, cool jazz delivery. The lyrics evade the truths, but there are hidden messages – "Time is cruel, nothing much we can do." "Time, time, time," yes, the clock is constantly ticking our lives away. However, the easy-going vibes of Ken's performance slows time down for a pleasant drift. So, drift awhile with no worries, maybe back to the comfort zone, who knows. Then we were treated to a song in progress called either *"Drunk Coming Home"* or *"The Count Song"* with its stomp style of comp jazz. Someone asked, "is he writing this on the spot?" Maybe, who knows but it sounds as though it'll be great when is all finished and done. So, a great set, with some interesting interludes, Ken. [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



Russell Neal: Then it was the turn of the manager of the night, the sound engineer and master of ceremonies to strut his songwriting stuff. I heard once in a songwriting seminar somewhere that songs that are more personal ring with audience more. I know a lot of American songwriters, especially Nashville types, disagree, and lay down tracks with few emotional connections which come across cold and bland – they are also the ones most worried by AI songwriting. If you deliver songs that have a great personal attachment to it resonates with others as they feel the empathy – something a computer would find hard to do. This is a definite case in point with Russell's song, *"Family Secrets"*, which details things Russell was told by his late mother. This song has an emphatic heart, the embarrassing stories in a family that could have caused social scandal all done to an infectious riff – "all those things that today don't really seem to matter very much were deep dark, deep dark, family secrets." All families have them, those dark sides that would cause embarrassment if found out, which is why every listener feels a connection to this song. Russell's next song, *"Bright Moon"*, left a twinge of sadness with me as Jocelin and I would often sing it to each other as it was her favourite of Russell's



songs – she even worked out the chords. Russell was walking towards some buskers one time, they saw him coming, and broke out with this song as he approached, he told us after. Jazz in a 1920's style and lyrics like "Bright moon, tell my baby goodnight," "I'll be back soon," or "Wipe the tears from her eyes." Sometimes love has to be apart and this song is the comfort for those suffering that affliction. So many people think that *"There Goes My Baby"* is the song of a pimp, but it's actually the story of a mate of Russell's who stays home while his partner goes out working – "She'll be bringing it all back to me," "She knows the ways of the world," or "She gives more than she takes." The middle eight starts soft then builds to "bringing it all back to me." There was an audience request for Russell's last song which was one of his late brother, Terry's, songs called *"Sweet Sugar Daddy"*. Written thirty years ago by Terry and playing in a band that Russell and Terry played in it features a super walking bass line that has a *"Baby Elephant Walk"* feel. The rhythm really cooks as the girls in the song sing, "Get a sweet sugar daddy and let him treat you nice." You can almost sense the girl's hips swing to the beat as they try to attract the sugar daddy who is "Like a limousine and makes the journey last." Yeap, there are innuendos galore in this humorous piece of scheming young women. A superb way to end off the official section of the night, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



A few others got up, but they played covers. The only person to play originals at the end was:

Gav Fitzgerald: I think Ken did the write ups and Cameron did the photography for me for this round so a big thank you to both. Sorry, if I'm not on the ball for that as I'd been hitting the Balter XPAs pretty



heavily that night, a bit of drowning my miseries in a way. Anyway, the second round of Gav started with his classic *"Kate's Friend"* which had Ken musing: "A song with a reggae blues form. Someone was hot on Kate's friend which prompted the song. The bridge moves from reggae to a different melody which is nice (Jazz, not wonder Ken like it!). The interludes of single notes creates a nice change from the reggae strumming." Gav's last song, *"Coalface"*, and a Velvet Road classic (The band Gav played around the traps from 1999 – 2014 with Ross and Peter) was about "teaching in the Catholic System in the late 90's and beyond." Ken noted: "Rock'n'roll in a Blues style that feature a punchy tune and lyrics. The audience appeal of the "Ha's" was encouraged by Gav. The bridge goes into a gentle melody then roars back to the

derisive "Ha's". *"Coalface"* is the reality of teachers in all the systems that have to deal with admin and bureaucracy." Thanks, Ken, for the review and Cameron for the images. [Gav Fitzgerald Part 2](#) on Stage –

The full video is available for members in the Member's Section

