

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 12/01/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

Paul Li – Paul sings all original Mandarin Chinese songs. His melodies are so strong that his performances



transcend the language barrier, and he easily grabbed the audience's attention. Paul started with "*Vagabond*" which featured some great chord changes that were "very rhythmic" said Jocelin. So melodic and full of passion that this could be considered "Chinese Blues". "Great lyrics in the chorus that are telling strong theme of 'living at this moment,'" wrote Jocelin. This was followed by "*The Most Romantic Thing*" which again featured some tasty chord changes. I like how the melody runs as its very fluid. The song and performance have great dynamics that are super, especially in the "Ohhh" part. Jocelin and I said the same thing: "I like the main riff" as it's a standout and gives the song that extra hook. "*Passing By*", which is Paul's third song is a breakup song. Starting off light and soft then increasing in dynamic delivery the song contains a lot of power and passion that makes me wonder if it is autobiographical? Once again, Paul's songs and performance are so enthralling and strong that the crowd can't help but applaud loudly even though few of them could understand the Mandarin lyrics.



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

John Wright – John is still recovering from some health problems, and you can see he doesn't find it easy getting on stage.

However, once that guitar is in his hands and that microphone is in front of his mouth he becomes a different person! Starting off with "*Your Barman*" which Jocelin thought had a "great riff, a great voice and was very rhythmic." Personally, I



though the song had a country style, had a good depth of dynamics and was very catchy. As usual John's voice was warm, deep and rich which is perfect for country music – think Tom T Hall. Then it was the rocking downstrokes to "*Do You Miss Him?*" with its super sense lyrics that have a questioning quality. There is such a great melody behind the hook line. For me there is a Beatles' influence in a country blues theme. Such a super song which John is producing buckets full since his days of a covers only artist. Last song is "*All You Gotta Do*" which started off with dexterous finger picking, while the hook line "All you gotta do..." has such a superb melody with it. The chord changes behind the melody are exemplary. It sounds like there's a ghost harmonica in the song's break as it then relaunched. Such a super song with a country folk essence, but with the bite of attitude. John has delivered three original songs that are every bit as good, sometimes even better, than those covers he used to deliver. [John Wright on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Sparkle – Dressed in a summer dress of sequins you could say Sparkle is sparkling, which is very Sparkle like –



"Hello you groovers." Starting off with "*I Can't Sleep*" which Jocelin said was in a "minor key" the song developed into a 2-beat country folk delivery. There's almost a Gypsy like atmosphere to the song. Is the protagonist in the song not able to sleep as she keeps thinking about a new love? However, one of the hook lines in the song is "What's done is done...", which sounds more like a song of regret. There is a tapestry of finger picking at the start of "*Footprint Of My Heart*", which once again indulges a minor key. Sparkle uses opera style vocals which explores a good depth of her range. The melody line of the hook is particularly good. Sparkle's last song of the night was "*Crystal Ball*" which has previously been recorded for Sparkle's CD, but this is the first time she has played it live. Once again in Sparkle's favoured 2-beat country rhythm that is enhanced by Sparkle's operetta style of singing. Both Jocelin and I agree that this song would work incredibly well in a musical setting. Sparkle ended her set with a liberal dose of



enthusiasm which put a smile on many faces.

Jill Riddiford – Jill bravely got up with her guitar as the audience for the soccer on the screens became incredibly vocal. Starting off with the folk orientated "*Leaving Town*", You could almost taste the sadness as



you are leaving both the good times and the bad. Memories swirl and coalesce with each object you pass that had participated in your earlier life's journey. I come from a small country town (Moree, where I was born) and a lot of the young do leave town eventually. Jill seems to have nailed this emotion well with her song. "*Vanity*" had a more upbeat delivery with the lyrics being delivered in an almost rap like intensity. Some people are just themselves, while some have to have shells, they show the world as they lack self-confidence. They say Vanity is "excessive pride in or admiration of one's own appearance or achievements," but who determines what is excessive? One way, or another, Jill delivers her message with passion. "*Our Place*" has the essence of smooth sailing in its laid-back folk delivery. Both moody and melodic, Jill captures both the atmosphere of comfort and entrapment of having your own place. The wisely use dynamics emphasises the lyrical content. A great performance, Jill, as your writing and stage act are constantly improving.



John Chesher – former President of the SSA (“The Chesh”) struts his stuff on the Society stage. Starting off with an Al Crew cowrite, *“How Many Clowns Does It Take To Make A Circus”*, John emphasises his folk heritages and displays “great guitar skill” said Jocelin. Such super lyrics about how inefficiency and incompetency can have massive effects on projects – sounds like the theme song for the Eastern Suburbs public transport system! John’s next piece was one I’m not sure I’ve heard before with me thinking its name was “Set me free”, but I was told afterwards it was *“Don’t You Hear Me Calling.”* Guitar wise there are some tasty claw hammer picking and a trill riff that cooks. Then the strumming section adds to the song’s dynamics backing an extremely more-ish melody that’s very persuasive. The song, driven by John, had Jocelin a dancing. Last tune from the talented tunesmith was *“I Wonder If We’ll Ever Get Back Home Again”* which John introduced as being about a washing machine that packed it in just after warranty finished. Things back then were more long lasting and reliable. This age “seemed so easy not so long ago.” This brings into question about the past and if it was better in some ways – “Somehow we lost the road.” Then the simple things are often better – “A day in Heaven is a day spend with friends.” John’s performances are always good, but his lyrical content is always so loaded with messages and intrigue. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Al Crew & Russell Neal – Its Al’s brilliant songwriting and lyrics backed by the masterful nimble fingers of Russell’s guitar work. I’d gone off to tune up so Jocelin took on the reviewer’s seat for the duo’s first song, *“It Can Only Be The First Time Once”*. She thought the song and performance had a “beautiful melody and great harmonies.” I’d come back so Jocelin handed me back the pen. Russell was sporting the new “Christmas Cheers” t-shirt that Jocelin had given him. Al’s super lyrics maybe you both sing along and at the same time think – a characteristic of Bruce Springsteen. Russell rips those riffs right out enhancing the song’s contents. There is such good songwriting that the chorus tugs at the brain and soon you are also singing along. I like the slowdown at the end of the song. I think some of the cleverest country writing juxtaposes conflicting ideas to form a third. This is the case in Al’s *“Unmaking Love”* with its lyrics detailing the unravelling of a relationship, whereas the protagonist would prefer to be making love. “Heavens above, what were we thinking of? Turns out, turns out, we were unmaking love.” I think Al is one of the best country songwriters I’ve heard in this country, along with John Wright, but the over processed Tamworth mob wouldn’t have a bar of them as they are too far into Americana, whereas Al and John are more real. Russell really cuts through the mix with his faux lap steel slide work. I’m not sure if its Russell’s massive riff work at the beginning, or Al’s plaintive first line “Took the Chevvy out to the basin”, but the crowd rose in anticipation to sing to the chorus of *“I’m Here, Where Are You?”* – a definite favourite! Russell has really nailed those backing riffs behind lines like, “Loved you more than I’m suppose to,” or “I’m still not over you.” You can hear or feel that pensive nostalgia, the keen edge of grief and even the bubbles in a lonely beer. Then the chorus hits like a sledgehammer in its anguished cry, which gets louder with each drink consumed. The memories visit, twist emotions, one minute a smile, the next a tear. Then the crescendo of voices ends off the song as everyone revisits a time when they too felt the protagonist’s pain. Once again Al & Russell have delved into the emotional pit of the songwriting muse and surfaced with rare gems. [Al & Russell on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Gav Fitzgerald – Gav is not sure who he is in the Society anymore as he’s not the Editor since the Songsmith’s demise in December. However, he is still playing at the Society Concerts! Al Crew did the reviews while Jocelin did the photography. Gav started off with the Harley D & The Professor/ Velvet Road classic *“Cold Outside”*, one of his capo songs. Originally written with a capo as the afore mentioned Harley D (Kevin Komene) had a limited chord range so Gav was able to explore other areas to harmonise with his guitar to give variety to their sound. Al wrote about Gav’s performance: “A slightly more laid-back style from Gav but still delivered with power and passion. Gav sitting down in no way diminishes the rock’n’roll mode. Interspersed with cut through lead guitar.” Gav’s second song, *“Kate’s Friend”* comes from a line that Peter Thompson said at a Velvet Road rehearsal many years ago. Al thought that the song was “upbeat with an effective “roll of the fingers” riff and an immediately sing along chorus – “Whoa ho, she is Kate’s friend.” The audience joins in with confident familiarity and enthusiasm, especially Linda & Ken.” Gav’s last song, *“Falling From Aeroplanes”*, was written just before Gav flew to India where he mixes his fear of flying with worry about getting older. Al noted the following: “Another strong performance interspersed with an effective (Unexpected?) monologue. A great idea for a song embellished by provocative, descriptive lyrics. Gav never leaves a room or an audience not knowing he and his songs are up there.” Thanks, Al, for the great comments and thanks also to Jocelin for the fab photos. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Rodney Spazapan – AKA Rodney Rockhopper had his 12-string acoustic and thumb pick in action. Starting with *“Ullathorns”* – I originally wrote “Hill Of Thorns” -Rodney took us down a folk journey 1020’s style. I like his use of harmonica as it has an authentic feel to it for his genre of music. I like the “Up diddle a....” section. The song feels like a folk ballad of yesteryear where ancient tales are told anew with a sing along section for the listener to join in. Then the more obvious *“You’re My Lover”* which had a more ethnic folk flavour as though once gain done in the 1920’s. That 12-string really adds an almost orchestral atmosphere to the delivery. The song has an interesting chordal riff and the feel of Tiny Tim’s *“Tiptoe Through The Tulips”*. The singing and the riffs work well together. Rodney’s last song of his set was *“One Thousand Years”*

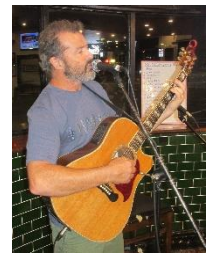


which Jocelin said demonstrated “great picking skills.” The song reminds me of Ken McLean’s material as Rodney uses the 12-string to its fullest. Like Ken Rodney’s song delivery has me thinking of Medieval minstrels playing at fairs, telling their stories to spread the news of recent events. Once again Rodney reminds me of C.W Stoneking with his retro style and Rodney has that genre in bucketfuls. [Rodney Spazapan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

Jay South – Jay started off with “*The Good Life*” which had a soulful delivery with a Boz Scaggs vocal tone. So, very jazz rock like and great to listen to in a laid-back mood. Maybe that’s what the song is about, cruisin’ through life just enjoying yourself. Not something many of us can do, but everybody dreams about. A mate of mine, Pit, just came back with his wife from a two-week cruise and he said it was the good life. My brother retired, but after six months of “the good life” is so bored. So, what is the good life? Is it a dream? “*Have You Seen My Friend?*” had a really great melody and was done in an Aussie folk style. It captured the audience’s attention well and had Jocelin writing, “No beer! Focus, Gav!!!” as I drifted away with the song. “*Break Up*” is more a strummed jazz funk with catchy lines like “Break up, shake up,” which makes it a really cool song. I think the band WAR would have done wonders with this one as I can imagine a funky bass behind this one cooking the rhythm. A great set of songs well delivered, Jay. [Jay South on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



David Power – David’s first song, “*December*” was only written a few weeks ago and had its initial showing up at the Coach & Horses in Randwick. Done in a light jazz singer style it really lifts when the chorus hits. Frank Sinatra would have liked to record a song like this, or maybe even Michael Bublé, as it has an exceptionally “beautiful melody” said Jocelin. The rhythm had Jocelin dancing in her chair, while the guitar skills are evident in their light jazz intentions. Then we got down to Earth with “*Gravity*” with its jazz chording and rhythms. The delivery and song reminded me in some ways of George Benson’s material being both laid-back and with an infectious melody. The song is very catchy a la Steely Dan in a rock jazz vein. Ken started tapping away as Jocelin grabbed the shakers the song’s drive was that insistent. Head nodding stuff in a funk jazz syncopation – cooking! David said that “*Sway Down The Avenue*” was written about when the woman you date makes the world perfect. This song is more folk like but with a winsome melody. The rhythm is more like a waltz that captures the sway perfectly in a laid-back delivery. There could be a George Benson influence again, especially with the “du dudu” part. Jocelin really liked the song writing: “Such beautiful lyrics. The melody suits the song’s theme. You could sense the feeling of swaying down the avenue.” Some really good songs so well performed, David. Great songwriting! [David Power on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Johnny G AKA John Givins – Johnny has written over a hundred songs and wants to perform then. He started off with the romantic style of “*I Could Have Searched Forever*” which starts off with a drum machine beat before the simple chords of the keyboard they emanated from kicked in. Done with a jazz flavour and in a ballad format Johnny sings that “I could live for ever, fore ever more” as he details how he has found the perfect love already. Johnny goes all out in this one adding a strong whistle solo. Once more Johnny G ventures into the escapades of romance with “*The Girl I Love*”. However, the performance has a different style with its upbeat chimey piano, and no drumbeat. The stomp bass covers the rhythm under the tasty piano riffs. I’m thinking of a cross between Bryan Ferry and Blur for similar sounding. I especially liked the middle eight as it really took you elsewhere. Johnny’s last song is one the crowd favourites as there are always constant call outs for “*Deadshit Dad*” every time Johnny G performs. Johnny G has three daughters, and he said “before 13 you are the biggest hero in the world. After that it all changes.” So, he wrote this song about that experience of being a father and the girls hated it. “We love it!” yelled out John Cheshier. Such a funny song about Johnny G being..., well..., Johnny G! This includes Dad jokes galore, being a beach/river person, etc with the girls all chorusing “Don’t embarrass me, Dad!” which the crowd loves joining in on. Johnny G just wants to be himself and “all they want is a deadshit dad. Some one serious and mad.” In the middle Johnny G threw the drum machine on with yahoos and whoops but didn’t run around the pub this time. All the scenarios are so well set up and so funny the crowd really joins in with smiles on their dials. Johnny G has a serious songwriting style, but when he does his comedy stuff he shows where his real talent lives. A really great set, Johnny G, and looking forward to you next one. [Johnny G on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Paul Connolly - I really like the chordal stabs at the beginning of “*I’m Free*” as they are a very strong song hook in themselves. Then Paul’s super vocal delivery nails the theme home – “I’m free, if you want to call me.” Paul has that knack of using space in his songs, not overcrowding them so that the pauses and dynamics really add an extra shine. Great song well presented! This was followed by probably my favourite of Paul’s songs, “*Pretty City*” which has all the imagery and feel of George Street on a Saturday night. Its alive, its vibrant, pulsating with energy and with an edge of the wild side. I love that starting riff just before the vocals start. It has The Jam written all over it. The drive and the melody support the extremely descriptive imagery – the pretty girls, sharp knives, walking through the wave’s excitement.... A night out hunting for pretties, walking in the city and it feels so right. Paul has told me previously that “*Dirty Boulevard*” was about seeing the backstreets and the seedier side of San Francisco while the chords remind me of Ram Jam’s version of “*Black Betty*”. All the imagery is there, the homeless sitting around, the old men slowly rotting away on the street, the girls with no hope in their eyes – “Come on down the dirty



boulevard.” Jocelin loved singing along to the “do du, dudu do do” vocal refrain – shades of Lou Reed’s “*Walk On The Wild Side*” perhaps, although that may be because of a similarity in subject matter. I’m a big fan of Paul’s songwriting and delivery as he has that edginess combined with a superb melodic sense and imagery that sets the scene in every song. Great work, mate! [Paul Connolly on Stage](#). – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

Ken D’Aran – If Paul has an edge, then Ken is the king of the smooth coolness. That beard must have been given fertiliser as its grown so quickly – I was only just getting used to the fresh-faced Ken! “*This Day*” which Ken said he’d written in June of a cold, wet Winter. There’s the stop start rhythm of jazz chords behind lines like “On a Winter’s day”. It feels like a celebration of Winter, with all the imagery of a restful day at home as its too cold to go outside. The warmth of a fire, the occasional sunbeam, the comfortable feeling of being snug while Nature shrieks outside. “The way it should be on this Winter’s day.” Like Autumn follows Summer, then Spring follows Winter in the seasonal cycle. So, “*Spring If Here*” is the obvious follow up to the previous song. Starting with some fluid fingerpicking the season blooms within the imagery of a Southern Hemisphere Spring. With an atmosphere that’s fresh and lively and an ecological message as well you can almost sense the essence of the season. With a dose of humour “*Tangled Tango*” makes its political comments plain. Written some years ago it is as relevant today as then – “I don’t know if you don’t know there’s a crisis going on” – as political leaders throw their pride around in vast grabs for power. Super egos with superpower and extremely powerful weapons all dancing to a tango beat – “I’ve got the biggest gun of them all” could be either Trump, or Putin, these days plus a few others. Ken really got into the song tonight – maybe he’s really worried about the world’ future? A super performance tonight, Ken, taking us from the warm comforts of Winter to the bouncing lambs of Spring to the harsh realities of dictators all in just three songs! [Ken D’Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Russell Neal – Our MC, sound engineer and concert organiser wasn’t going to play tonight but Jocelin gave him a t-shirt that had a cartoon on it saying “Christmas Cheer” so Russell felt he had to play his song called “*Christmas Cheer*” while wearing the t-shirt. Such brilliant images of a Christmas with the “in-laws” you’d rather not remember. Each misadventure was met with a gale of laughter. You thank God you weren’t the protagonist, but you dwell on the drunken actions that led down to the ultimate failure. On the way “I knocked down granny’s ashes”, “Chundered on Daddy’s rug carpet” till he eventually fell off the roof trying to be Santa. Like an aural Charlie Chaplin you can help but laugh the song is so descriptive and good. A great way to end off the night, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



The January 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 13th of January there were about sixteen players entertaining the audience of which there were a fair few. John Lagerlow, Lesley McCann, Linda Beagrie, Jocelin Chan, Shining Axe, and Jon Morrow, dropped in for a visit and a listen.