

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 12/01/26
2nd Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

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) 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 12th of January there were eight players booked with seven 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 Jack Peck, Linda Cheshier, James Brannelly, John Lagerlow 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.



Ordered the Fish & Chips, which was so big I couldn't finish it. Then the room was very hot and sweaty, so we asked them to put the air conditioner on – the difference was amazing.

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

Paul Li: Paul is a brilliant songwriter because even though most of his songs are in Mandarin the riffs and vocal melodies are so strong everyone loves to hear them. Starting off with "*A Fantasy Paradise*" with its repetitive riff, super percussive thump and strum. Such brilliant dynamics with the percussive effects sounding a bit like a tabliah (Lebanese drum) even to the percussive rolls. The song ends with those repetitive riffs. A superb song about a friend who had a big crush on a girl. One of Paul's best songs, "*Vagabond*", was the next cab off the rank with its grungy picking start. This was followed by a determined strum which quietened into light down strokes with a superb vocal melody over the top. This then lifts to a stunning chorus. Even though in Mandarin the emotional projection is exceptionally strong. Paul uses minors well in the break, then picking. A super, super song. This was followed by another classic Paul Li song, "*The Most Romantic Thing*", which sounds light and airy. It's not! Starting with a full-on New Wave style strum, then an almost Heavy Metal riff that's so catchy. Then the melody that's a killer. The squeak of the pick against the strings is another percussive effect. As I was next to play, I think it was John Cheshier on the review for Paul's fourth song. As there were fewer performers every act was given four songs tonight and Paul's fourth song was "*Da Qian Shi Jie*" which is a love break up song. John wrote: "The song has a ballad structure with a nice rhythm. I can't comment on the words, but the rhyming pattern is good." Once again Paul has delivered an excellent starting set of original music that starts the Society's December Concert off well. [Paul Li on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Gav Fitzgerald: Thank you to John Cheshier for the write ups and to (I think) Ken D'Aran for the photography. Gav started off with the classic from his "*Another*" album called "*The River*". A bit of a crowd favourite which begins with the pick screeching like a ghostly banshee along the guitar strings before going into a full-on soul blues rocker. John noted: "'Tears in that damn river,' is it being polluted by them, or perhaps clarified? An old favourite – sits right next to "*Dry Drought Road*". The river of life perhaps?" Sparkle was doing backing vocals on this one. This was followed by "*Falling From Airplanes*", Gav's song about getting older. As Gav says, "Even when you are born you are getting older". John had intriguing viewpoints: "Is this song a death request? No! The body moving on? There is an insistent rhythm that accentuates the fall. Better get a flying squirrel suit, Gav!" A lot of people like this particular song with a number of listeners picking it as their favourite from the upcoming album from Gav called "*To Travel On*". Gav's next song, "*Sing The Blues*" is obviously a Blues song and will be coming out on Gav's upcoming "*To Travel On*" CD. John mused: "Who are the Blues? Who's singing this anyway? "Everybody will sing the Blues." Done in a walking Blues style, this one is going to sound great filled out with band instruments." Gav's last song was a newish one called "*I'm Feeling Good*" with the emphasis on loving life in a bon vivant way. John's review seemed to focus on the song structures: "ABBA then returns to tag lines. ABCB then celebration. An up-tempo song with a stark ending." Thanks, John, for the reviews and Ken for the images. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Sparkle: The lady of effervescence and vibe in a sparkly top and shiny blue slacks put a smile on all the faces as she sings the



appropriate, *"I See Stars"*. This song featured tight picking and atmospheric vocals. A folk ballad with a soaring melody, this one is newly written. It's great to see prolific songwriters not just playing the same ol' same ol'. Then Sparkle played her classic *"Listen To My Heart"* which she said was "another love song." We are wandering down the avenues of guitar picking again with a very strong melody and a great chorus. This is a soft rock classic! A newbie to me, *"Drunk On Love"* uses a clawhammer technique with a bouncy melody. The sound has a jaw harp twang, while the vocals are used well to elaborate the lyrics. I like the ending "Oh ho oh". *"Shadows In The Moonlight"* is another recent song once again done in a picking style. Its good to hear Sparkle trying

out new things. The song reminds me of material for a musical as it has great dynamic changes and a wave like motion. Some good new songs there, Sparkle.



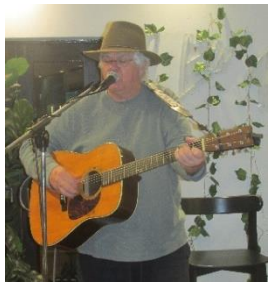
Jocelin Chan: Jocelin has become quite professional in the last six years of constantly planning open mic nights. Its that regularity of putting yourself in front of a crowd that polishes off the rough edges and makes you an accomplished performer. We all hope that Jocelin keeps this going and doesn't get caught up in her workload. Starting off with one of her pharmacy songs Jocelin held up a poster showing the two tablets involved in the song, *"My Heart Skips A Beat When I See You"*, one red and one blue (Both are heart tablets not the blue one you are thinking of!) Then Jocelin showed her rockier side as she hit the strings hard on her first strum. The verses cook then punch out the great chorus. A really strong melody and fantastic melody – what more could you want? The capo goes on and then Jocelin launches into one of my favourite anti-bureaucracy songs, *"Tick The Boxes"*. This song had Linda singing along with gusto – she knows the feeling!! Done with a clawhammer technique each verse brings out the ineptitude of those form creators. Such a strong melody to pump the powerful vocal intensity.



"Tick the boxes and they'll all be gone." Not sure why, but I have the feeling Jocelin's boss is somewhere in the audience as she had a playful smile announcing her third song, *"Hey Boss"*. The song for every person who is a worker. This has a delicious sense of humour in it which is powered by Jocelin's smile. There are some persuasive changes between sections which Jocelin enunciates with a worker's passion. I especially like the super dynamics at the end. Jocelin's last song was written when she was more in a pharmacy pop frame of mind. *"Dopamine"* is about falling in love in a community pharmacy which a stunningly good chorus which had Ken playing along with the shakers. Super great rhythm that kicks along. Even though things have changed between Gav and Jocelin we hope to still hear at Society gigs as she is such a good performer. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



John Chesher: It's the Canadian influence on the Society, John Chester, who is next in front of the microphone. With his tall frame and wide brimmed hat, he looks like a seer from the back country. When he plays and sings, *"Harbinger"*, the Bluegrass feel makes him sound like one. The word of warning done with a tasty minor feel. What is being foretold? You'll have to listen to the lyrics. You can sense the ethereal essence of a past relationship in *"Room With No Door"* with nostalgia running riot in all the best ways. The graphic imagery has that Beatles ambiguity that makes it even greater. When Linda first heard this she thought John was "a sensitive New Age guy" Oops! Then John's famous one chord song where he sings along with the riff. This has so many great guitar moments to keep that one chord interesting. This has the flavour of a late 60's style classic. John's last song is a cowrite from when they were out busking called *"Christian Companion."* The lyrics are exactly what the old man was telling the buskers, so a reality story. The



Block'n'Tackle Choir made an appearance as well, with lots of nostalgia. This song is a super story played and sung so well. Once again John demonstrates the abilities of a master songwriter and guitarist. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Russell Neal – Our acclaimed sound engineer and MC Russell Neal then came out with some *"Family Secrets"* which has some superb storytelling in the skeletons-in-the-cupboard of the Neal family. Nearly every family has them somewhere, but Russell has turned his into a personal exposé, but that's what makes it great. One thing missing from a lot of modern music is "the real" and this song is as real as you can get. Full of "Deep dark, deep dark, family secrets." Russell then kept things in the family by playing one of his late brother, Terry's, songs called *"On Their Own"*. The song has a superb minor feel that reminds me in part of *"Eleanor Rigby"*. Such a great chorus and super verses mixed in with superb riffs over a rocking rhythm – "Hold onto me...", "Don't let go..." Then it was time for a classic Russell song that's a crowd song and this time it's *"Mr Hardway"*. Every verse in this song from "chasing three-legged chickens" to "making love standing up in a canoe" is about the choices made by Mr Hardway and he likes doing everything the hard way – so humorous in a super



Blues fashion. Then there was a call out for another comedy classic in the form of *"The Lady Loves Women"*. Russell was joined in stage by Linda and Gavin. A song about running into an ex-girlfriend whose changed sides in love. All of the awkward situations where "we'd be making love for days and days, but now she's in her post-heterosexual phase". People who know the song are all smiling and singing along, the newcomers are laughing out loud. Another amazing set from Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Ken D'Aran – The laid-back gentleman of the Society Concerts was back with his acoustic guitar. His first song off the list was a homage to his guitar, *"The Never Lonely Blues If I Have You."* A sad song about relationships with people as apposed to his



relationship with his guitar – reminds me in theme of the song *"Reindeer Are Better Than People"* from the 2013 Disney animated film *"Frozen"* which I know as Jocelin was a big Disney fan. Except it's the guitar not the reindeer done with Jazz tinges. Then lyrics, lyrics, lyrics of guitar imagery in a light, atmospheric song. Even though it was the middle of Summer Ken brought all the imagery of the opposite season in *"A Winter's Day"* which starts with "It's a nice day today." Full of definite Jazz intentions you can feel the heat of the fire, the Winter's sunbeams and the creeping cold. John wrote: "I like it just the way it should be. Cold as fuck, blue skies and beautiful", yeah, that sounds like a Canadian response. Ken has had a fluid life of many paths, one of which was a hitchhiking worker, the experiences of which he distilled into the song, *"Shadowlife"*. All the imagery of a life on the road, of yellow town streetlights, truck

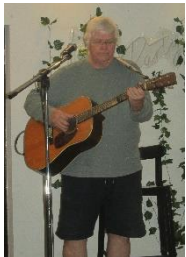
air brakes, roads stretching into the night....Ken captures this so well. "This is the road, and the road is my home." The twilight zone of society, being neither here nor there – "Shifting through the night?" Ken's last song is such an epiphany of modern politics, especially in places like the US, China, North Korea and Russia.

Yes, and it's all done to a dance rhythm from Buenos Aires (BA to the locals). Correct! It's Ken's classic *"Tangled Tango"* as "There's a crisis going on." This one is for Trump and all the megalomaniacs – "Mine is bigger than your!" So well done with humour and taste, but also way so accurate. A great way to end off your set Ken. [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



As we had quite a bit of extra time there were a number of performer additions. One of the benefits of hanging around to watch the others perform.

Gav Fitzgerald: I once again had John doing my review of the song, *"Dry Drought Road"* which he called "Rude & lewd. Need I say anymore" (Ugh? It's about drought time in the country? That one left me scratching my head.) "The song has a great rhythm, and you know the outcome of driving down that road." Thanks, John, for the review. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



John Cheshier: Once I learnt the horrific back story to *"Circles Round The Moon"* the lyrics made so much extreme emotional sense. Starting with a riff entrée the line "Angie, here's a song for you, I think you know the words, too late for making promises, like circles round the moon." Like Crowded House's *"Hole in the River"*, about Neil Finn's Aunt's suicide which makes it almost chilling, *"Circles Round The Moon"* is about John's girlfriend who followed the same path. You can hear the disbelief, the grief and the stunned shock in the song. Ending off with the lonely cry of *"Angelina"*. Wow, what a song! [John Cheshier on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

Russell Neal – Russell got up and did another one of Terry's (Russell's late brother) songs called *"My Mama Said"* which is pure rock'n'roll with Blues intentions. My favourite hook line is, "You've got to learn to crawl, you've got to learn to say please." A top song and I like how you keep Terry's legacy still going. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

Ken D'Aran – Bob Weir, of The Grateful Dead, had died the day before so Ken honoured him and dedicated his last song to his memory. *"To Be Or Not To Be"* started off back in the Paddington RSL days as a challenge from Gav for Ken to write a reggae song. Ken totally stuffed up his assignment but came up with an amazing song about male facial hair! "To shave it off or cut it back." If you know Ken you'll know he sports beards, moustaches, short and long hair in a constant search for his identity and this song captures that. A super way to end the January Society Concert, Ken. [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

