

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 14/07/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The July **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 other Monday night.

On the SSA night on the 14th of July there were eleven players booked with all but one 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 Beagrie, Illya Szwec, Jae Magsipoc, 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.

Paul Li: Paul is a great songwriter, especially in his native Mandarin, but he also like to sing English covers. Tonight, Paul graced



us with his two originals first. The first of these in English translation (Thanks, Joz) was "*In QINUO's Heart, A Little Poem*" which was lightly picked with some great dynamics and sung in Mandarin. Paul's performance quieted the audience with its softer delivery. Jocelin wrote: "Paul Li is the only one who could play a song in Chinese and still capture the pub's attention. He uses a range of rhetorical questions in the verses." The guitar riffs fly at the start of "*The Most Romantic Thing*" which Jocelin wrote up as "a rhythmic song, with a good use of word rhyming. Each line of the chorus has 'Shi' rhyming. Paul has very good guitar skills." Thank you for your translations and perspectives with Paul's lyrical material, Joz. Paul then did a



cover which we don't cover, but he did grab the audience's ear with his original material. [Paul Li on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

Sparkle: The most effervescent performer on the Monday nights has to be Sparkle with all her original songs. She started off with her romantic side with the song "*You Are Perfect For Me*", a feeling I'm sure everyone has had at one time or another, and over time that can change. Done with a light picking style the first flourishes of love are dealt out in a melodic tune with operetta tinges. The song has a great hook which catches the ear well, a real ear worm so to say. Sparkle indulging in a lustful fantasy about her dream partner. Maybe "*Angel Sweet*" is a follow on from the previous song, or is it about a generous or helpful, person? Once again performed with a light picking style in melodic runs that are reminiscent of a Country & Western feel circa 1940's. I wonder if Sparkle is aiming this particular one at the Tamworth market especially as the chorus is good and catchy. Its not hard to know the song's name as it repeats in the outro.

Sparkle's last song was "*I'm In Love With My Guitar*", which all of the assembled musicians could identify with. You only have a problem when you are in love with a harem of guitars! Which one do I play with next?? Jocelin thought that the song had a "feeling of songs from the movie, "*The Wizard Of Oz*"." I think that maybe because of the 2-beat claw hammer style of playing and the use of dynamic pregnant pauses. The chorus has a great hook sing along which a number joined in with – probably other guitarists. Once again Sparkle has livened up the room's atmosphere and put a smile on everyone's dial.



Hiromi Takano: Hiromi plays ukelele and normally plays cover songs. However, she did one original, her second song called "*The Memory With Cherry Blossom*" which emphasises the cultural diversity of the Society Concerts as it was sung in Japanese. Unfortunately, Joz couldn't help me with the translations of this one as she can speak a number of different languages but not Japanese. The song did use a range of dynamics in its delivery with changes between softer sections and more driven parts. As well, it had a very catchy melody which was very pleasing to the ear. Good on you Hiromi for playing an original tonight and playing it well. [Hiromi Takano on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



The Shop Steward: The next act on the bill preferred to be called The Shop Steward who wished everyone a "Happy Bastille Day" which also celebrates thirty years of the wife – I wonder if his wife is French? The Shop Steward started off with the song, "*With My Family*", which shows the style as being folk, but with impassioned Aussie tones. The VB sticker says it all in this ballad of suburbia and family gatherings. Great imagery that most of the room could relate to this one is definitely home grown and proud of it. The Shop Steward then told us he was a fitter by trade starting at twelve years old, but now he was a home dad. Added to that was his experience being on the sixth floor above the Lindt Café terrorist siege and not being able to leave. These led into the creation of his song, "*We Will Find A Way*." Starting off lightly picking there was great imagery of the day and the after events from the perspective of the trapped people above the café. I had a case of sliding doors myself that day as I got out the bus in Elizabeth Street at Martin Place, I thought about going to the Lindt Café to get something to thank Stew, who I was recording with, but I realised I was running late so I turned down towards Wynyard instead. It was about 9.30 am so I probably would have been caught up in the kerfuffle – I was shocked when I heard the news at Stew's. The Shop Steward's imagery captures what a lot of Sydney siders felt on the day. He's a superb balladeer as he delivers his messages with much passion. The Shop Steward's last song of the night was one he'd written for one of



his four boys, his youngest who he welcomed to the world as a baby with “*Song For Alexander (Happy Birthday Son)*”. Done with a nice, bright strum which Jocelin took over reviewing as I’d gone off to tune up the ol’ guitar: “performed with strong strumming this is a beautiful song written to Alexander from his Dad. You could feel the love and support from dad to son.” A great song full of passion, mate. I haven’t heard The Shop Steward before, but I hope he graces our Society songwriting stage again in the near future. [The Shop Steward on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Jocelin Chan: Jocelin took to the stage and in a very short time she made it hers by capturing the audience in the pub. Starting off with a relatively new song, “*How To Be Human Today*” which has a very catchy chorus with themes from elsewhere and a different melody that’s very strong – “From a highway to hell to a stairway to heaven”. The song questions the place of religion in the modern world and how a lot of it depends on perspectives and asked how we can be human these days. Each questioning verse leads us back to the chorus that lifts and encourages the crowd sing along. “*I Remember When*” is about running into a past crush and looking back with a smile, but the crush has no memory of the events. Jocelin played this so well, even with pick droppage, and her crystal-clear vocals enunciated the words so well. She was onto pick number 3 when she hit the line – “Forget it then...” Sometimes when you see, and talk, to a crush after the dopamine rush, they have many shades of grey not noticed before. Jocelin continued down the nostalgia road with a song for a friend who’d recently passed away and is now only “*Part Of My Memory*”. The story of their university days and a trip around New Zealand feature strongly in the waltz like rhythm – “Cocktails of cucumber and lime.” Really nicely picked with a fluid nature the song celebrates the “Flamingo girl” and her fight against a cancer. But alas, she is now just part of Jocelin’s memories. Jocelin’s songwriting covers ideas from different angles as she laterally looks at humanity with a different perspective. Added to that her flair for performing and singing and you have an extraordinary talent on display like tonight. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Gavin Fitzgerald: Like a bull out of the gate at a rodeo Gav strode up to the microphone, sat down and catapulted into “*Two Feet*” which had John Chesher, who was reviewing, commenting: “The song has a Blues structure. I like all the allegory in this song – “I hear your body talk.” Yeap, this is a Blues number with riffs galore and how you would like to see your partner walk. Its already recorded for Gav’s new upcoming album “*To Travel On.*” The we set sail “to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before” (Sorry, Star Trek) with his song, “*My Girlfriend’s An Alien*” where gave explores the possibilities of a relationship between an outta space alien and a human. John noted “Gav’s girlfriend really is an alien” – No, John, she was born here so she definitely doesn’t qualify as an alien, not even an illegal alien! “A great little story with a few Jonny G Sound effects. Area 51, that alien she’s mine. Then off the planet to meet the parents!” “Now that’s truly scary” says Gav. This was Gav’s attempt to mix a Hoodoo Gurus style song to movies like “*Cowboys & Aliens*” so a lot of fun to explore. Gav’s newest song, “*You’re Magic*” was next and it was to his girlfriend who’d put in a lot of effort into a work band only to be looked down upon by the singers. As John wrote, “Don’t piss of a songwriter,” as they could use you as the next song’s cannon fodder. John seemed to like the lines: “You are the fox they are just hounds”, “Your song is a more active sound” etc. John’s comment was “They wallow in misery while you soar.” John’s next two comments had me scratching my head: “I don’t know about song structure” – it’s a standard verse chorus and middle eight style song. “It felt kind of like the Youngbloods” – Their only hit was “*Get Together*” and I can’t yet see the connection? Maybe I’ll ask John over a few beers later. Thanks for doing the reviews, John, and Jocelin for the photography. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Paul Monaro: I haven’t seen Paul before at a Society Concert so this might be the first time we’ve heard him. Paul started off with “*Could I Be That Man*” with its fluid pivotal playing and superb vocals that really give the song that essence with telling lines like, “Could I be that man?” A story from the dark side done in a balladeer style. Paul has a definite style about his material which adds a certain uniqueness to his performance. Paul’s next song was “*Home*”, although the hook sounded like “songs for the older generation”. Paul wrote these after singing songs for his grandson ad wondered what about songs for me? The song features a great chorus with the vocals carving out the material well. Paul’s last song was “*Angels*” which was written for his grandson in once again a folk balladeer style. I like the dynamic changes inherent in this song as it brings it out of the ordinary. It seems that Paul is quite a bit of a family man, although he did go a bit Gothic with the first song. [Paul Monaro on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



David Levell: I think we’ve seen David at a couple of Society Concerts in the past, so definitely not a newbie. He started off with “*ClockaClay*” which had some tasty folk imagery with unique phrasing and interesting vocal tones. David presents the song well and the audience appreciated it. Next up was “*For Awhile*” with its slower rhythms and an edge of Country & Western. Probably the best sonic idea would be if Steve Harley & The Cockney Rebel played Tamworth material. There was a great hook chorus and David’s different phrasing. However, the song’s rhythm got Jocelin to pull out the egg shakers and play along. I like the title for David’s last song, “*The Key To The Lock Of The World*” which has a folk edge, but more like Marc Bolan’s material – “Goodbye all you cannon balls.” The song very much emphasises the title with its interesting Donovan style lyrics – “Goodbye my sarcophagus.” The song has that feel of the flower power era with an extended title and psychedelic influenced lyrics. What goes around comes back around so maybe that style may be coming back in vogue. A very interesting performance of your songs tonight, David, which the audience lapped up energetically. [David Levell on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Russell Neal: Our noteworthy Society Concert MC and sound engineer Russell took to the stage to play a number of originals.



Russell's material are crowd favourites, and he started off the set with an ode to a former girlfriend, "*Trish*". Russell said he decided to play this song as he was at a party the previous Saturday night and his ex-girlfriend was there. The edges are coming off this one from constant plays, so it flows nicely now, especially with the picking and telling lines like "You chased me until I caught you." The heartfelt ballad of a past relationship with lines like "So deep an ocean so many fish" and even more descriptive "It's really good to see you, Trish." Sometimes some emotions are hard to let go of, but the past is history and Russell addresses this in this song. It's very much a ballad as there's a definite story of the relationship beginning, the trials and tribulations with end left in confusion. Russell is well known for his comedy songs and "*The L Word*" is one of the best. The story of a girlfriend who would do everything in your lustful imagination,

but one must never, ever mention the "L" word as it scared her. Jocelin continued the review as I went to get drinks: "This song got the pub singing along with "*The L Word*". This is a funny song filled with so many puns. The lyrics really create a picture in your head." Russell's last song was "*Don't Be Afraid, Baby*" where Russell details some bad experiences he's experienced in Sydney – well, he does live in Surry Hills! These have created a paranoia and distrust of the city. Russell has even had a favoured guitar stolen from his car in his unit's parking lot. The chorus is the girlfriend's words as she tries to calm the rattled Russell down. This would be interesting to have a female singer do the chorus while Russell does the verses. But we've all been there as its part of City living. Another brilliant, evocative set of songs from the master writer, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



John Chesher: John is a stalwart of Society Concerts and a former President of the SSA, so his songs are well known to many SSA members. John started off with one of my favourites, "*Sacrifice*", with its theme of honouring that do sacrifice for the good of the community, the armed forces, the police, the army, etc. Such beautiful phrasing and heartfelt emotion flows through this song – "Those who return will be changed in ways they'll never know," or "Still you have to go." This so reminds me of my late Dad, who was a Rat of Tobruk, escaped POW, etc. Dad only ever marched on ANZAC Day in Sydney once, in 1999, and I followed him around in the crowd to make sure he was okay. I talked to him and some army mates after the march, and some stories were illuminating or further illustrating what Dad used to tell us kids on the hour-long drive from Moree. They were all volunteers, not conscripts, who felt they still had to go. "*Sacrifice*" is a song that still brings tears to my eyes in memory of my father, but also for his mates who didn't come back. Maybe offer this to the RSL for them to play? I like the story of the origins of

"*Harbinger*" as John just liked how the word sounded in his mouth so decided to write a song based on the word! A harbinger is a herald of something coming, not necessarily negative, but I think John used it in this context – "I shouted at the storm." So, a precursor to tragedy with doom and gloom upcoming. The nearest example of this forewarning genre would be CCR's "*Bad Moon Rising*", although that's rockier, John's would have more in common with Crosby, Stills & Nash's "*Wooden Ships*", although I prefer the Jefferson Airplane version. John's last song of the night was something I've experienced maybe too many times – shades of a Mental As Anything song in there – yes, its "*The Devil Saw My Face*" with its theme of having a hangover. Done in appropriate Bluegrass style it was very popular with the pub population. John dedicated this one to me as I had a big birthday party the previous Saturday. John was so encouraged by the audience's response that he played a kick arse version tonight – there's a real rock star hiding in all of us! With superb Country & Western riffs and lyrics that really detail the experience John has captured that feeling many in pub would recognise. A top way to end a fantastic set tonight, John. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Kenneth D'Aran: Somebody had to be sent out to the lion's den to calm the crowd down after the feeding frenzy of John's last song. Who could that be?? It could only be Ken with his nylon stringed guitar who sat down and played "*Bored Out Of My Mind*". This was a new song by Ken and was done to de-bore himself. There's an Arabesque feel to this song with a Moorish Spanish mix that's quite striking – "Give me some space." This is a good newie and did calm the listeners down. There's a great flow of lyrics in "*Running Around*", Ken's second song, with super dynamics in evidence. The song has a great chorus and that Moorish influence can be felt on this one as well. I like Ken's last song, "*Simple Means*", as it details what leading a simple life entails with "maggies call and seagulls scream." There's a tasty jazz flavour that leads us to an "existential state of mind". I really like the operetta middle eights "No, no-no, no". Jocelin liked the Spanish Español outro.

A great performance to end the official part of the Society Concert, Ken. [Kenneth D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



The night had finished early so those who were still around were offered more performance time. These songwriters included:

Gavin Fitzgerald: With Gav's second bite of the bullet, he pulled out two of his classics. Starting off with "*The River*" with its soul rock rhythms and grief themes all driven by Gav's guitar rhythm skills. Jocelin picked up the reviewer's pen: "The song got Ken a tapping on the table and the crowd singing along with "That damn river." Gav followed this with his song about his workplace called, "*Coalface*". Full of the angst of dealing with bureaucracy and management who seem to not understand this song was played with passion. Jocelin wrote: "Got the crowd screaming "Ha" along with Gav's call, or scream, which really represented how sick of the workplace he can get." Thanks' Jocelin for doing the reviews and Ken the photography.



John Chesher: John's second dose of good performing medicine was his ultimate loser song, "*Why Me?*" If anything can go wrong with the protagonist in this song it does making for a very humorous lyric. Then again, we've all had days that do happen like this – maybe the biorhythms are off or something? A great riff and we are back with John ringing Centrelink at least three times to get through the castle walls and the frustration that ensues. John only did one extra song, so he passed the microphone baton to the next performer.



Kenneth D'Aran: Ken had enough time to drop in a couple of songs before the clock ticked to 10 pm. The first of these was the classic "*Time Bossa*" with its jazz like, laid back delivery. Is that the barman's call, "Time, time, time"? I like how Ken takes different rhythms and makes them his own. Note, I'm still waiting for a reggae one! Ken's last song was a crowd favourite and the first song he ever wrote. Called "*About Time I Wrote Me A Song*" it details all the frustrations and trials beginner songwriters go through including the dreaded third verse, which Ken instead added a scat like jazz vocal riff to and it's made the song one of his most popular! A super great way to end the night, Ken.

