

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 8/06/26

2nd Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The June **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 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 8th of June there were seven players booked with all doing original songs in their set. It was definitely a quieter concert but that's not surprising as it was the Monday night of the King's Birthday long weekend so many people would have been away or returning to Sydney.

For attending songwriters, the Society Concert is a great time to listen to how others approach songwriting, become inspired, all the while socialising and networking to find out what's happening in the world of songwriting. A number of songwriters come along just for that and don't actually play. Could you be one of them?



There were many talented songwriters playing on the night and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he knew: "And thanks to Linda, and everyone else who came along!" 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.



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.

Russell was remarkable on with his P.A, sound engineering and MCing of the night. So, when the P.A was warmed up then the first act of the night, Rory, came up to the stage.



Rory Faithfield: It's great that Rory was able to come along before he flew out the following Wednesday back to Ireland. It was just a missed opportunity to hear a master songwriter and performer in their element. Starting off with the classic, "*Gold On The Inside*" with Rory's resonate vocals filling the room. "I've got holes in my socks." Such brilliant lyrics its superb to be able to hear Rory one last time before he leaves. His second song is also a classic for those who know his material. Called "*Window In My Heart*" the song was heartfelt and played with much passion. Amazing lyrics like "When the cracks appear and stars align," or "My heart is free as I have a window on my mind" (Brilliant melody on that line!). Rory said he played it more gentle than he thought. He suggested that maybe he ate too much dinner and it slowed him down? If the first two weren't enough to demonstrate Rory's abilities, then "*Rolling Waves Of Blue*" would be a definite clincher. Nicely picked for an atmospheric start – "I followed the river, down to the sea". A stunning combination of imagery and emotion – "I surrendered to the riptide and submitted to the undertow." It is fitting that Rory's last song was one of his most popular, "*To Be Your Darling*", which is done in a waltz like $\frac{3}{4}$ beat. There is an almost ghost like keyboard sound that accompanies "Is it too late?" and the rolling waves of emotion therein. "Is it too late?" is a superb prechorus until the uber hook line of "To be your darling, somehow?" Such a stunning sing along combination, like a one-two punch of passionate feelings. Add to that Rory's caramel vocal tones, dynamics and guitars skills then you have the penultimate performance. I hope all goes well for you in Ireland, Rory.



Sparkle: Sparkle and I had been discussing ghost stories – I have a number of real ones! Then she told me she trained as an opera singer for two years at 19. That totally explains her vocal performance style immensely. With a greeting of "fellow groovers" Sparkle launched into her philosophical musings in "*What's Done Is Done*". Influenced by her mother's idea of "Don't cry over spilt milk." The song delivers a great melody and a top hook line that'll make you think. The ending is very operatic in a very catchy song done in a 2-beat style. Second song of the set was "*The Night Is Full Of Stars*" which started out being brightly picked to bring up the idea of the sparkling stars. Funny thing is I can hear ghost church bells in the background. You can hear Sparkle's training coming out in her operatic/opera style which is atmospheric and expansive like the Milky Way. I like the repeats of the hook line, embedding it well in the subconscious. An astronomer's special that Linda said was "sparkly and a starry performance." Then it was the 2-beat style of "*Crystal Ball*" with it's faire type, or style, with whimsical operetta dynamics that ebb and flow

throughout the song like the mystical images that would appear in the crystal ball's interface. I had to head off to tune up and I asked Rory if he could do me a favour and review Sparkle's last song and my performance, which he was quite happy to do. For Sparkle's last song, "*Unicorn*" Rory thought it could be in the soundtrack of a Baz Luhrmann film with its mix of opera and folk. A great performance again, Sparkle.



Gav Fitzgerald: Next up was Gav and Rory kindly kept the reviews going for me and I think John Chesher did the photography.



For Gav's first song, "*Limbo Land*", which was written in the time back in 2020 when his former partner had broken up with him for a week and he didn't know where he stood in the relationship. Rory noted: "Another of Gav's great canon of Van Morrison style Celtic soul songs. Torn between blues rock attitude and a folk story telling with a little dose of some Baptist style ranting." This was followed by "*Going Out Of Space*" which was written at the same time as the first song about the same situation where she'd said she needed some space. The song had Rory musing: "Another shot of Gav Fitz liberation in a

rocked-out reinvention of a space travel song." (Shades of Hawkwind there!) Gav's third song was one he'd only written that day, a definite newie! Written about the recent breakup with his partner called "*Judas Kisses*". Rory wrote: "A punchy tune that reflects a Troggs like raw power. Pop punch to the gut." Then Gav's fourth song harks back to that same time in 2020 when he really launched into a plethora of songwriting. The song was "*Beauty Always Burns*", as love seems to always to hurt. Rory surmised: "This song smoulders and illuminates the darkness of lost love with another slice of Gav's fiery passion." Such great reviews, Rory, so many thanks for your kind words and thanks also to John for the images. A lady from the audience yelled out "You're a hoot!" as a compliment to Gav's performance. Linda commented that the last song "was very powerful!" [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



John Chesher: John came onto stage to play a co-write with Al Crew called "*Particles*". John has decided to go with a delay pedal with this one, but I'm not sure if that was the reason for the feedback start. The delay and John's picking combine to give a very atmospheric start with a Scientific bent – "I'm just particles lost in space." I like how the middle eight I s used. A song about how we are all constructs of atoms, molecules and compounds AKA the particles John is singing about. A newie for me and so maybe the first time John has played it on the SSA stage? "*When You Go*" has a special significance to me as John played them at the Society Concerts after my cousin, who was like an elder sister, Colleen and my brother Rick died last year. So, a strong emotional connection. A song for all those who are gone, or going, on that great final journey – "When you go may you walk in starlight". Love does extend beyond the grave, so this song is a beautiful prayer. The line "Thought I'd be the first to go" always reminds me of the funeral of good friend Greg "Buzz" Bolton when I was in my early twenties. As me and his other mates were leaving the Cemetery I said the same thing which made them all laugh as they all agreed with me.

Years later, Tim, who was part of that group said to me that that was the only time he laughed the whole day. So, that line rings true with me in a "only the good die young" vein. Luckily the third song was on a happier note being about how our influences guide our musical journeys in "*Sum Of The Licks I've Learnt*." Done in a 3-beat Bluegrass finger picking style. The song is about learning licks is like riding bicycles in that you keep falling off until you get it – "Some get saved, some get burnt." Such superb lyrics about the process of music creation – "Play it from here, nick it from there," or "Trying to write those elusive tunes." John's last song, "*Old Henry*" is one about wanderlust, maybe for Rory, in a full-on driven folk format. The question asked is why he developed the wanderlust, or was it ingrained in his genes. "The winds pulls on the redwoods" to "The freedom to never being free." Old Henry runs from capture and the seductive comforts of life, but why? As usual John delivers a strong set of songs for the audience's listening pleasure. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Al Crew & Russell Neal: I don't know of anyone who doesn't look forward to hearing Al's material backed by Russell. The duo started off with Al's classic "*I'm Here Where Are You?*" with the protagonist looking back at a relationship after he'd "Took the chevy to the basin". With tasty riffing from Russell the lyrics take us on a pathway of nostalgia, a feeling I definitely feel these days – "I headed down to Rosa's Cantina". You can feel the words are haunted by the absence of the other person which leads to the extremely catchy chorus of "I'm here, where are you?" Russell's lead riffs just seem to add a bluesiness to the pathos. The duos harmonies are exemplary. Then we left turn into the philosophical "*Life*", which prompted Russell to exclaim, "Well, its better than the alternative!". Al starts the singing off in falsetto – "Hard to get up when you are down on your luck," then the super hook of "La de da de da, la da de da de de, it'll all work out eventually" Such a melodic rollicking tune to put a smile on your dial. "A bird in the hand is

better than a poke in the eye," where mixing up the metaphors works so well in that there's a hint of familiarly but in a twisted mode so the old and new add interest which is good songwriting. The third song is my all-time favourite that I occasionally find myself singing at work, or on the bus, or... Yeap, its "*Dancing To My Memories*" which is an absolute classic. It's like Al is dancing with someone from nostalgia but also remembering the bittersweetness of those memories. Maybe that's why Al always seems to have wry smile, brought on by all of life's experiences, both good and bad. The older you are the more intense the feeling of this song. Russell commented at the beginning of the song, "I tune because I care" as he honours the song. "I'd have loved you more somehow" is the wistful entreaty to the past. But we are all "dancing to our memories" which prompted Linda to get up and join in the harmonies. For some reason this song was particularly poignant and beautiful tonight. Maybe I was "dancing to my memories" which is better than crying! Linda stayed on to join the boys for the last song of the set which was appropriately "*This Is The End Of It*" which had Russell on a slippery slide riding down behind lyrics like "Sometimes I whistle Dixie", or "And I loved you yesterday", or "Elvis has left the building." Life is about endings and hopefully new beginnings, but everything, no matter how good, will eventually end. Even a doner kebab! Once again, a brilliant performance from Al and Russell. [Al Crew & Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



Kenneth D'Aran: Ken called himself on the bill Ken Worth & The Truckers – typical Ken humour! But he's not going to waste our time by driving into "*Time Bossa*". As Ken said his biggest problem is time management so why not put that to a rhythm straight from Rio de Janeiro circa 1950's. So great jazz intentions as Ken grooves through his considerations about time. Thinking about time, I like how Ken uses timing changes in this song to good effect, especially the staccato stutters on the guitar. A super melody and lyric driven delivery has me thinking of the laid-back beach attitudes of Copacabana and Ipanema. But like any of these places you have to watch your back as the clock could creep up on you and steal your era away. Like an A-double the brakes need a gentle nudge to shift back the gears for "*A Little Water, A Little Sun.*" The song starts off with a great lyrical introduction of "So many people" before putting us through a roller coaster of emotion but watch out for angel gear. This is emphasised by the jazz dramatic dynamics and Ken's favoured chordal stutters. There are light passages then heavier ones like some jazz fuelled Pixies. A tale from the time of CoVid. You can hear the aural air brakes even more as Ken heads into the valley of the "*Winburndale Rivulet*" – "Not quite a river but not a creek". You can hear the whispering wind, the chuckling ripples over polished stones and past dipping branches. You can fossick for gold in this Roxburgh County waterway, in the Bathurst Region, but Ken has already taken the true gold and turned it into a light, breezy, sparkling sun off the moving water homage to nature. Once again, some tasty timing changes and a super repetition of the hook. Very languid and laid back like Ken. We have to rev the engine to climb back up the energy hill to Ken's last song of the set which was "*Simple Means*" which starts off with a chewy bass riff into an "Existential state of mind". Challenged by the mechanisms and technology there is a cry of "No, no, no-no," before we are told "I'm just a simple man with simple means. This is the natural verses the modern world in a jazz fluid attitude in which the volume and dynamics have free reign. This then leads us down the path to a Spanish middle eight and superb connecting chords. I like the little riffs Ken throws in. Once again, a great performance from Ken near the end of the night – keep on truckin', Ken! You are Worth it! [Kenneth D'Aran on Stage](#) – [The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.](#)



Russell Neal: Russell was the last official act of the June Society Concert. There was a call out from someone a few in the audience for Russell's late brother, Terry's, song "*Broken Down Again*" as it's an amazing piece of songwriting. Russell does it so well and honours his late brother every time he plays it. "There's a killer on the road, But I'm out here on my own," demonstrates how the lyrics can mean more than one thing. It's not just a broken-down car in the middle of nowhere at night it's an approach to life in general. Sometimes life can deal us foul blows, but we have to pick ourselves up and get on with it – "I'm like this old car, broken down again." Such a superb song that Russell delivers so well. The audience joined in the repeated outro choruses of "Like this old car, ar, ar, ar, ar". Such a philosophical song of pure brilliance! Then it's into one of Russell's own songs, which also has a philosophical bent, but in a comical way. Yes, it's "*Mr Hardway*" to which Linda yelled out "Yes" and raced to brag a microphone as Ken took over the P.A duties. If anything can be done more difficult then our protagonist says, "I'll take the hard way every time," cause "It ain't no crime." The audience joined in with gusto as Russell used leads with accompanying bass notes and Ken was clapping away. This is desert madness Blues in its truest form and very funny! From the humorous to the introspective as Russell reveals his "*Family Secrets*" which features a great minor chordal riff. Russell exposes all the skeletons in his family's closet as told to him by his mother – "My mother told me all this stuff, she said these days they don't really seem to matter all that much. But back then they were deep dark, deep dark family secrets." A harmonica would really work well with this one has it has a Blues feel to it. After visiting the past we aim for another tangent, this time of risqué humour with "*The L Word*" and Russell's "rampant libido". A ballad of a lady who is happy to do anything your imagination could come up with, but is scared of the word "love." All the suggestions and innuendo make this a very funny song that the audience engages in singing with passion. Once again Russell delivers a superb performance again tonight. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – [The full video is available for members in the Member's Section](#)



Gav Fitzgerald Part 2: Gav took the opportunity to play a couple of songs when Russell said he had some time left and who would like to play. Gav didn't have time to organise any other writers, but the two songs he did play were old favourites "*Walk Right Back*" from the old Velvet Road days. This is a bluesy song about jealousy with drops to each verse. The second song was a Linda fav called "*Kate's Friend*" which was influenced by a comment by Peter Thompson at a Velvet Road practice. Influenced by "*I Shot The Sheriff*" and other Bob Marley material. Gav calls the rhythm Whiggae – white reggae. [Gav Fitzgerald Part 2 on Stage](#) – [The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.](#)



Kenneth D'Aran & Russell Neal: There was some time left so Russell and Ken got together to play one of Ken's songs, "*To Be Or Not To Be*". A song about the male dilemma, "To shave it back," or "To cut it off." Russell added some truly flavoursome leads to help the song along. "To mess you to mess with me." Both men were cooking with fire tonight and a worthy end to the Society June Concert. [Ken D'Aran & Russell Neal on Stage](#) – [The full video is available for members in the Member's Section](#)

