

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 10/03/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The March **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 10th of March there were about eleven players (Two were cover artists so won't be included in the reviews) on a once again hot humid, sweaty night. In Queensland its strong winds and flooding, while in Sydney its cold beers and humid heat. So, the crowd featured many, many people there having catch ups and beers. They had come to drink with mates but got into some superb, original music.

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 plethora of talent playing and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he knew: "And thanks to Linda Beagrie, Jack Peck, Jae Magsipoc, Illya Szwec, 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.

John Chesher – First horse out of the stalls was ex-President of the SSA, John Chesher who showed his dexterity with nimble fingers on the acoustic guitar. It was scary going first as there was a large number of drinkers who were very loud and boisterous. However, John calmed the savage beasts with "*Its Better To Be Smokey Than Cold*" and its folk country style which really was appreciated by the whole audience. There were lots of cries of "This guy's good!" from the assembled beer appreciation society. Russell has excelled himself tonight with his sound as John's vocals & guitar were crystal clear! John has quite a wide range of styles in his repertoire. This can be seen in his next song, "*What Can I Do?*" which has a Marvin Gaye feeling to it. A song with a strong message in. Starting with some hooky riffs that Steve Cropper would have been proud of as they are so hooky. Played with great passion from the open chording's droning strings. The song asks, "What can I do?" against all the bad things happening in the world – does that include Trump's crew? Such



a brilliant piece of the songsmith's craft and should be released upon the world. Don't hide your songs just for the open mic nights, John, you need to give them wings to go beyond so that people can question, "What can I do?" and then do something about it. Every little bit helps. Then the song that every person can relate to after a big night on the town, and I'd say that large table of loud imbibing musical enthusiasts will feel it tomorrow, about the hangover – "*The Devil Saw My Face*". Think Southern Blues meets Bluegrass with all the guitar wizardry flying fingers can muster. The wild crowd went bananas for this one yahooing along and it became the foot tapper extreme as John reacted to the excited crowd. I think John was riding the wave of energy outpouring as though the drunks all knew the path they were on and its destination already. That's probably the best I've heard John play that song, one of personal favourites! A super set of stunning songs played so impressively, John. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.



Sparkle – I was really wondering how Sparkle would go in front of the roaring crowd who hadn't yet settled after John's delivery. I felt like it was a bit like a fairy ballerina appearing straight after a full-on Punk band. However, Sparkle seemed to calm crowd with aplomb – I think it was her confidence in herself that did it. Sparkle started off with "*I'll See My Love Tonight*", a romantic love song that was backed by a finger picked acoustic guitar. It really quietened the crowd down that even their loud boisterous conversations quietened. I thought these guys really do respect musicians and songwriters of different styles. Sparkle employed a operatic technique of vocal pops, or slight jumps which made the song more interesting. However, I thought it was her second song, "*Fireworks*", which was the best of her set tonight. The purple capo went on and an impressive double stop claw hammer riff emanated from Sparkle's guitar. Such a cool hook for the song! It brings up a style that Russell sometimes of that of a travelling Medieval minstrel. Very melodic and memorable it really grabbed the crowd's attention. Sparkle's last song, "*You Killed My Heart*" was one that she hasn't played in a long time. Featuring soaring vocals and a great melody its folk ballad conveyance really ended Sparkle's performance really well. The audience applause was deservedly forthcoming.



Gav Fitzgerald – A bit hard to review myself, so I asked Al Crew to do the honours and Linda to do the photography. Gav pulled out the old Velvet Road classic, "*The River*" to start off his set as he's very confident of its delivery. The table of inebriated music appreciators really got into this one. Al wrote: "The song is riff based with dirty vocals (In a good way.) The vocal delivery is as powerful as the Clarence River emptying into the sea with a full-on Westerly behind it." One of Gav's work mates saw the video of this performance and was amazed at Gav's guitar artistry. Then brought out a couple of ones that he hadn't played in years. Both were written at the start of his relationship with his partner, Jocelin, when the issue of the relationship hadn't yet solidified, and they'd broken up for a week. The first one was "*Outta Space*" when Jocelin had said at that time she needed some more space. Al's comments included: "Gav's driving rhythm guitar and powerful, yet sympathetic, vocals recognising



how delicate human relationships are. Sparkle said she particularly liked this one. Gav's last song was "*Beauty Always Burns*" with the heartbroken grief of a relationship gone sour – it only broke up for a week, but it prompted a whole bunch of new songs. Al noted the following: "Anchored once again by a strong rhythm guitar intersected with clever little guitar flourishes to give contrast. A power trio of songs with well observed messages." Thanks for the reviews, Al and also to Linda for the photos. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section.

Jill Riddiford – "*Space Cowboy*" was the first song Jill ever wrote with its tale that "drove all day and played all night." I detect a certain Bruce Springsteen influence in the lyrics writing as it tells a very descriptive story. Is it about a traveling music act? It has a really catchy melody that's quite memorable. Jill's second song "*Chase The Sun*" was written ten years ago and contains references to "403 Page Not Found" as a symbol of work frustration. That's when Jill decided to "Chase the Sun" instead. I like the use of jazz chords and how the dynamics morphs from claw hammer style picking to full on strumming – the change between the verses and chorus has a certain The Pixies feel about it. Probably a very appropriate song for early Autumn where the last heat of the previous season still hangs around waiting to change is "*Endless Summer*" where Jill wishes it wouldn't end. There is a great use of repetition in this song which works well to imbue the hooks, which are particularly good in this song. Jill's song delivery is coming along in leaps and bounds. [Jill Riddiford on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section



Roger Dileria – Roger is another musician songwriter who everyone seems to know but I hardly know. I know I should get out and play more, but I'm constantly snowed under by that four-letter word – work! Roger seems to be quite influenced by his relationships in his songwriting. His first song, "*I'll Love You For The Rest Of My Life*", is a good example of this as it was written for his current girlfriend. Sung with a 1960's jazz crooner style I like how Roger combines the electric's sound with his soulful vocal tones that have an amber warmth to them. Roger's next song, "*I Miss You*" is currently being played in America. It was written about his first wife who died of cancer in 2011 after a ten-year battle with the disease. The lyrics and the jazz rock style really quietened the audience. You could feel the heartfelt passion especially in the strong melody of a time of extreme grief. Roger's third song was "*If I Had A Time Machine*" which had a do-wop genre feel as though from the early 60's. I like the use of the middle eight as it's a good holiday from the main theme. The use of dynamic pauses is very masterful while the "Oooohs" work well. Roger got a fourth sneaky one in called "*She's A Red Hot Mama*" which had me thinking of Robert Johnson's "*Hot Tamales*" with its Blues ragtime jazz feel. Add to that some tasty country licks and you have a real foot tapper. A great set of songs, Roger, and I hope we hear you again at one of our Songwriter nights. [Roger Dileria on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section



Al Crew – Al walked onto the stage accompanied by his lead playing sidekick, **Russell Neal**, and with **Linda Beagrie**, being a guest vocalist. Al strums, Russell cooks and the first line "It won't hurt a bit" tells you that this is "*The End Of It*" which was written while getting to the end of a lunchtime kebab – it's funny where songwriting ideas strike. There is an Americana feel behind the superb lyrics. Linda's vocals at perfectly in the mix while Russell's riffs are becoming so good with the songs. The crowd really showed their appreciation with one punter shouting out "Well done" a number of times. One of my favourite Al Crew's songs, "*Oh Mexico*" was next with Russell's riffs really adding an extra hook. Linda had retired to the tables after her impressive efforts in the first song, so the harmonies were all Al and Russell combinations. I think back to the 1950s/1960's Country & Western ballads with this one. The stop start rhythms echo the music of Mexico while the drive is aimed to make you get up and dance while singing along. I've travelled through Mexico and this song bottles the country up well. "Oh Mexico, oh Mexico, you'll never ever know, if you never ever go." Excellent song! Everybody new to Al's material are shaking their heads in amazement he comes out and hits them with the classic "*I Am Here Where Are You*" which starts off with "I took the Chevy to the basement" and announces Al's Marty Robbins influence with lines about Rosa's Cantina ("*El Paso*") just before the hook buries itself deep into the subconscious. Then another superlative riff from Russell hits the highlights, while a whistling solo harkens back to the mid twentieth century C & W sound. We end of with the hook being hammered through multiple repetitions with the audience singing along with gusto – "I'm here where are you, love you more than I'm supposed to, I'm here where are you?" If you want to know what good songwriting an Al Crew performance is a definite learning experience. Russell's riffs are the whipped cream on an already great aural dessert. The combination is pure food for the ears! [Al Crew on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section



Kenneth D'Aran – The gentleman of the Society was next up on stage with his Takamine GRC3 Cenat acoustic electric classical guitar – nylon strings of course. Starting off with the first song Ken ever wrote appropriately entitled "*About Time I Wrote Me A Song*". This is an amazing effort celebrating the art of songwriting in a super rock jazz feel. I like the jazz scat of "Bup bah bah" while the proliferation of 4th add a 1930's Ziegfeld Follies atmosphere, full of the energetic joy of creation and life. Then Ken calmed the situation down with a laid-back rendering of "*Winburndale Rivulet*" – "Not quite a river but not a creek." Done in an easy breezy relaxed delivery you can feel the ripples of water over rounded peddles, catching at drooping ferns in the constant call to gravity. You can tell that Ken would love just to pull up a stump, with a cool whiskey-based beverage, sitting in the cool shade as the current saunters past with an insouciant attitude. No matter your age we are all getting older and in the later quarter of your journey you can feel the frost upon the eyebrows. However, inside we are all still twenty-five and still want to achieve things. Ken wrote about this feeling in the song "*While I Have Wings*". I like the starting riff





and vocal doubling which has a very Irish Celtic ambience to it. There is also a touch of an Indian raga in its essence. As Ken said, "This is a song about getting older and who cares!" Another great performance, Ken, with your cool jazz style adding another vibe to the night. Ken also played an extra song at the end of the Society Concert, one of my favourites about a male dilemma concerning facial hair – "To cut it off, to shave it back." Yes, it's the ever classic *"Identity"* backed some Russell doing some Santana like lead breaks – "To be what I want to be, or not to be." Such a great song to end off the night and everyone

John Givins – It's the Panama Hat, the cheeky grin and the appearance of a keyboard that vastly indicate that it's Johnny G time again. By this time, I'd joined the table which had a plethora of drunken music appreciatives as they'd vacated the end nearest the stage and the video wasn't blocked by ukeleles etc. Johnny's first song, *"I Want To Tell You I Love You"*, was written many years ago. The song itself had a selection of tasty piano riffs and thoughtful lyrics. Johnny's deep vocal works well with the romantic material he's fond of writing. Performed in a 60's jazz soul style the song has a twist ending of "Now you're not mine." So a song of deep declaration of love morphs into one of nostalgic regret with that one line – great songwriting. Then the next song, *"Surfer Joe"* about a Cronulla Beach surfer who everyone admired, was really greeted enthusiastically by the crowd on the table I was on. This was full on rock'n'roll barrelhouse piano that Jerry Lee Lewis would have been proud to play. Especially with the song's main

piano riff. Johnny is a real entertainer and had everyone singing along to the "S-s-s-s-surfing" refrain with a "yooooow" that reminded me of the Flaming Barstools. The crowd really got into it and you could tell the people on my table loved their old-time rock n' roll. Johnny G finished off with another romantic ballad called *"If I Aint Got You"*. If I remember correctly this was Johnny's marriage proposal in a song with a soul jazz theme. It's funny one of the inebriated ladies on my table said, "This sounds like something you'd play at a wedding." Maybe she wasn't as under the weather as everyone thought! I like the stomp ending and the Elvis like "Thank you very much" which promoted a discussion about Elvis' material on the table I'd joined. A great performance as usual tonight, Johnny G, although I think your "Panama hat" needs an ironing – then again do real Panama hats ever lose their shape?? I know the answer as I brought two in Ecuador where they originate from. [John Givins on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section



Paul Connolly – I told the large group of people on my long table that they were in for a treat as Paul is pretty good. This kind of quietened their singing of Little Richard's songs – blame Johnny G's influence from the previous act. However, Paul had his full-on New Wave rock drive in 4th gear so captured their attention with his first song, *"Pretty City"*. Such a cool song about walking through the city on a Saturday night – probably George Street South of Town Hall. You can feel the pace of the footsteps, the swivel of the head checking out the sights, the sounds, the smells, the senses – "Let's go cruising tonight in this pretty city." The lights, the buskers, the girls, the restaurants, the glamour, the excitement all bundled into one very catchy song – amazing! I've often wondered what is the main theme to *"If You Want To Call Me."* I've always known it was a great song with superbly placed hooks and quite sing along. Lines like "I'm free if you want to call me" had me confused but is a stupendous chorus. However, tonight I got it when the line was shone on the line, "Till you find him girl, will I do?" So, it's an entreaty to a girl who is out of your league and who has a "list" of her paramour's requirements. Paul always has straight forward lyrics that are also quite intriguing. This came he found in his third song of the night, *"High Up In The Trees,"* which has a superlative lead start that morphs into a rock jazz momentum. "We used to be so free



like the monkeys high up in the trees. I think about you occasionally." What a line that says so much with so few words – great songwriting. As well the use of pauses and dynamics add another layer of complexity. So, a song of a past lover, one part regret one part nostalgia and one part a wry smile on the lips. Paul told us where the origin of the song came from tonight. His Dad said the line "You're to blame" and told Paul to write a song around the line, which became *"High Up In The Trees."* AS we had less turn up than expected and we were finishing early Paul was given another song by Russell. *"Dirty Boulevard"* is a relatively new song about Paul's observations of the backstreets of San Francisco. That's one of the problems of the US is the disparity between the rich and the poor is enormous with no social health or wealth backups. The song is driven by a funk riff that comes across as a mix of Cream (The band) and Prince's material. The verses are delivered in a

rap like fashion while the chorus hits hard especially with the "Dodu dodu dodu dodudodudo du" which is very sing along. All of Paul's songs sound like super hits, but how to get them out there? [Paul Connolly on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section

Russell Neal – As there was a fair crowd of listeners still around Russell pulled out his trusty guitar, and with Linda providing backing vocals, launched into his classic *"Bright Moon"*. Every ti, with a me I hear this song I think of Russell in a tuxedo singing into a carbon mic with the atmosphere of a speakeasy around him – smoky, sly gin, flappers with long cigarette holders and feathers in their hair, etc. Ken contributed a whistle solo from the audience while the ears listen well to a very catchy tune. Then Russell exposed his romantic side by singing *"Trish"* about a former girlfriend of that name. Featuring some nicely picked guitar and humorous lines – "You didn't care I lost the car," "I loved you and I fought you," which all lead up to the chorus of "It's really good to see you, Trish." Then the dynamics unfold as the journey of the relationship continues – there a start, a middle and sadly an end. Are both participants in the relationship like actors in a play? "Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish" I like how Russell has turned a missed girlfriend into an emotional musical expedition. However, Russell has to leave us laughing so he pulled out an old favourite, *"The Lady Loves Women"* about meeting an old girlfriend (Not Trish!) who now bats for the other side. "I really don't blame her 'cause I love women too," especially "Now she's in her



post heterosexual phase.” It’s such a funny song as Russell juxtaposes his memories of her with her present relationship. The chorus is so good that the whole audience joined in singing along. As Russell was the last performer of the official Songwriting Society’s Concert, he really ended it well with many smiles on people’s dials. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Members Section