

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 09/03/26

2nd 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) 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 9th of March there were eleven players booked with nine doing original songs in their set. It was a night of heavy driving rain, and I wondered will many be driven away by the squalls.

For songwriters, the Society Concert is 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.



Despite the downpours there was an abundance of talented songwriters playing and Russell thanked the following supporters of songwriting that he knew: “And thanks to Linda Chesher, Jack Peck, 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.



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 on baking with his P.A, sound engineering and MCing of the night. So, the P.A was toast ready when the first act of the night, Paul, was asked up to the stage.

Paul Li: Once again Paul hit the ground running, but with a cover! However, it is a cover of one of the other regulars, Cameron's, song “*Windowsill*”. Paul does a great version in a song that wishes for a new love. However, I do prefer Cameron's vocal tones and phrasing which I prefer. I can't understand why Paul does do covers as his songs, like his next one, “*Vagabond*”, tend to be so much better. Even though in his native Chinese the lyric melody and the song's drive are amazing. The dynamic changes remind me of The Pixies material. Even though no one in the audience understands the lyrics they are mesmerised by the song's aural aura. It ends like it starts with atmospheric picking. This was followed by “*Passing By*” which uses suspended time chords that delivers a pensive sad tone to the lyrics. There's a nostalgia feeling and dreams of yesterday that build vocally to the strong chorus. Once again Paul's amazing phrasing grabs the ears even though in a different language. Extremely atmospheric and with hidden depths. The outro quietens as though rousing from a familiar dream to bring the listener back to reality. Another superb set of songs, Paul. [Paul Li on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Sparkle: Resplendent in a purple and red shiny combination tonight. The rain tried its strongest to be a Biblical deluge just as Sparkle took to the stage, but her enthusiasm drove the weather away. Especially if you are singing “*I See Stars*” which would pierce the clouds in your mind. Reminds me of “*Somewhere Over The Rainbow*” with its themes. A very strong melody that has an operetta intent, like something Gilbert & Sullivan might have written – positive and uplifting. “I see the stars when you are with me.” Sparkle's picking skills really came to the fore with this one, supporting the vocals well. We've all been there when are hearts are broken or breaking someone's heart. “*Footprints On My Mind*” was written after Sparkle broke up with her boyfriend. Flourished with light picking the lyrics tell the story of how past relationships always have lasting impressions like footprints on the mind – all those little things that are now gone. This song definitely suited my current emotional mood. A song with a very strong melody and falsetto edges. Then I asked Ollie if he could write the reviews of Sparkle's last song as I had to go tune up. There were two writers as the handwriting is different. So, the combined review of “*Don't Fight With A Bus*” was: “A very operatic voice! The song has a fairly standard chord structure. Full of good humour of a tale of bus or bust. So, “don't fight with a bus” or Faceplants R Us!” Thanks for doing that review, Ollie and John as Sparkle performed well on the night.



Gav Fitzgerald: Once again Ollie and John took the reviewer's reigns while John doubled up on photography. Gav started out with *"Smile On My Face"* which is a song about how sometimes you have to show the world a stoic image while inside you are totally damaged. Written from a true experience and combined with his current grief of a recent long term relationship breakup it prompted the following combined review: "Gav is a powerhouse of original, contemporary Blues songs. In *"Smile On My Face"* Gav is brutally honest! "I'm dying with a smile on my face"! Gav introduced *"Common Man"* about those things that are hidden from most people. The combined reviewer noted: "Hidden, red wine & caviar, passwords, understand? Or confusion? It all opens for the common man." Gav's last song *"I'm Feeling Good"* is purely about feeling the joy in life, that perfect day when life feel amazing. The combined reviewers wrote: "Birds in springtime, feeling Springtime good."



"Summer dress is her uniform" – that sounds a bit Donald Trump-ish (Ed: WTF? A lot of women get around in summer dresses, especially if they are going to the beach like in the song. How is that "Donald Trump-ish"????? Someone has a warped mind and it ain't me!) "Are you feeling good?" Thanks to the reviewers and John for the image.

[Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

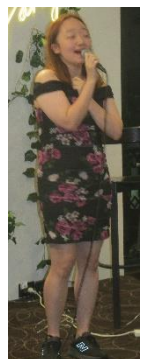
Cameron Alcorn: Cameron brought out his Fender Telecaster Acoustasonic (His has a black body faced while mine is light wood). Starting with *"Making Love Like You"* which was tightly picked and an extremely evocative atmosphere. Is that because of Cameron's amazing phrasing and vocal tones which are totally unique and brilliant. The song's hook embeds well. Ollie's only criticism was that the song was "too short". We were then treated to a new song, *"Follow My Lead"*, which was written only a few weeks ago. I like the song's build towards the chorus, then the drop back once it arrives as even though the chorus is quieter its quietness makes it more poignant – "She got me till the end." Cameron left one of his best songs, the classic *"I Just Want You"* which really upstages Paul's version of the song. Cameron's performance features tight picking and pensive lyrics, while he hits out the beat on the guitar. Such a fantastic chorus hook that grabs hold like an angry Rottweiler while the "hmmmm's" work so well as an extra hook. The middle eight is like the intro before the repetition of the chorus. Once again Cameron has delivered a superb performance that grabs the audience by their ears. [Cameron Alcorn on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Rory Faithfield: As Rory took to the stage the heaven's opened with a tremendous roar as the rain hit the roof – was this God also applauding Rory? The first song horse out of the gates was *"Love In A Burning House"* which has a hint of Bruce Springsteen in its lyrical delivery. Rory's deep resonant vocals adds to the lyrics – "May you rise above the burning house", "You can be the fire and I can be the gasoline." This is the about the fire of lust at seventeen. Rory talked about how he uses his thumb strum – "You gotta get tough." Next up from the Irish connection was *"Before You Fly"* which started with a soft strum that supported Rory's vocals well. Then that great chorus that hits the mark dead centre. Rory's material always features excellent phrasing – "Come what may." The song was about how life is in stages. Rory's last song is one of his best, *"When Your Eyes Adjust To The Dark"* which he has been working for a while. It has a very fluid nature like water over rocks in a stream. Once again featuring superb phrasing. "There are things you cannot see..." – excellent pre-chorus. When that amazing chorus hits it grab's everyone's attention as it makes the lyrics crystal clear – "There's a door that opens the windows in your mind." The repetition of the chorus at the end cements the hook into the subconscious. Another brilliant performance tonight, Rory.



GaYeon Lee: We welcome GaYeon as she hails from South Korea and will be heading back there soon. She teaches K-pop and how it works to students in Australia. However, she used backing tracks of her playing an acoustic guitar to sing to but then *"Our Story"* morphs into full orchestra. Sung in her native language the song weaves it magic despite the audience not understanding the lyrics. GaYeon is extremely professional in her approach. Her second song, *"I Still Feel"* also sung in Korean, starts with a lightly played piano and a high falsetto vocal. There is a slight waltz feel to this soft rock piece with jazz inclinations. Then it changes into a full production with GaYeon soaring vocals really demonstrating her amazing talents – extremely professional! Hopefully we can hear her again at another songwriter's night before she leaves. [GaYeon Lee on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Craig Naylor: Craig had one original song which was *"Keep It Brother, Keep It Brave."* The song was very obviously Dylan influenced but Craig uses dynamics to emphasise points. Another thumb strummer like Rory but done in a more minor tone. "Keep it real," is a good repetitive line. It would be good to hear more of Craig's original material. [Craig Naylor on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

Jae Magsipoc: Jae was really happy showing everyone his new “Talk To The Stars: promotional flag for his gigs before he went on stage. Jae started with a new song called “*Get Up And Dance, Love.*” Jae got into it full on with a funk dance groove. It’s great repeating that hook line as its very catchy. The lyrics are quite exploratory for a dance song, but I can almost hear the beat in the background the feel is so precise. Then it was capo time with a “*Passion To Serve*”. The song had a more straight forward strum but with a strong melody and tasty phrasing mix. I like the build to the chorus which reminds me of the vocal change in The Loved One’s “*Ever Loving Man*”. That short sharp style of phrasing is excellent. Jae did have to battle a drooping microphone but once Russell fixed that the chorus has a falsetto and normal voice mix. Then a change in the capo position and then we were into Jae’s classic “*Wanderers*” which John Chesher predicted would be next. The audience got into the superb chorus – “*Wanderers, oh ho we are, victorious, oh ho, we are.*” There’s a great balance between the verse style and the chorus energy. At the end Jae goes into a post song rhythm rocker a bit like The Who did at the end of “*My Generation*”. Then to celebrate a great performance Jae does a little ceremonial break dance. Another good set tonight from Jae. [Jae Magsipoc on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



John Chesher & Ollie Agostino: I’m taken back to the days of John’s open mic nights at The Excelsior Hotel in the 2000’s where Jon and Ollie would end off with a jam. John said he was “Living in the danger zone” and asked Russell to increase Ollie’s guitar volume by saying, “More, more, more.” The boys honoured the late Country Joe MacDonald with a cover of one of his songs before they played, “*Sacrifice*”. This song always reminds me of my dad who was a “Rat of Tobruk” and an escaped P.O.W. The song is for all those who sacrifice for society including soldiers, the police, ambos, etc. “Many who go don’t come back, they stay forever.” Great lines, “There’s a voice, right out on the edge of reason, that calls you.” All done to a Spanish riff that has the edge of the Alamo in it which was followed by a super Spanish jam. This was definitely a case of when $1 + 1 = 3!$ John originally played “*Room With No Door*” to his first wife who felt it took her home. Interestingly it was written about their relationship problems. With Neil Finn like lyrics in that they carry so much depth and meaning that’s not immediately obvious – “Intake of breath, backs breaking.” Weirdly I hear a ghost sitar in the mix while Ollie adds tasty Spanish style riffs that made Linda exclaim, “Beautiful!” A great set of memories from the boys from the Excelsior. [John Chesher & Ollie Agostino on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Orlando Agostino: Ollie mainly played covers, but the last song ventured into those grey areas where it could be considered for review. “*Wild Willies*” was written Australian songwriter Brenda Lee Heathcote who gave it to Ollie to play about 20 years ago. “Led by the stream where the wild willies bloom.” Some great phrasing over Ollie’s superb picking “as the sun slowly fades into the gloom.” [Ollie Agostino on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.

Kenneth D’Aran: You can tell the Concert is near the end as the Dean Martin of the Society takes to the stage – but that’s real whiskey not apple juice and Ken is a definite night owl. Ken started off with “*Springtime Is Here*” with its jazz touches and spring imagery from the Southern Hemisphere. There are definite ecological messages in the song – “The damage we have done.” The song is nicely picked by Ken with some tasty chordal phrasing. This was followed by “*Listen*” a song about not knowing what to say. Starting with a drone the song quickly morphs into a very catchy piece that’s a real ear worm. I like the lightened pull backs and the super rhythm. I also like how Ken adds percussive effects to push the ideas across. Even the backbeat changes really cook. “*Winburndale Rivulet*” was one of Ken’s earlier songs and apparently a big favourite of Linda’s. Once again featuring Ken’s picking style we delve into nostalgia – “Forty years ago, it feels like yesterday.” The whole feel of the lyrics and music has that lazy laid-back effect of “not quite a river but its not a stream.” All the aspects, the overhanging trees, the pebbles, the sand all come out to put you in a time and place – quite descriptive. Laid back, timeless and showing a great mastery of passing chords. Linda at the end exclaimed, “Beautiful, thank you.” [Kenneth D’Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Russell Neal: There was time for one more song and Russell grabbed it to play his classic, “*Mr Hardway*”. Linda got up to sing along while Ken and John provided backing vocals from the audience. “It ain’t no crime” was big response from the gathered crowd in a story about a bloke who always likes to do think differently, especially when doing it that way is difficult! A great way to end a top night, Russell. [Russell Neal on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.

