

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 12/05/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The May **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 12th of May there were about thirteen players all of which were songwriters playing original material.

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: "Thanks to Will Austin, Annie, Jack Peck, Steve Walsh, Tania, Linda Beagrie, Stephen Whitteridge, Liam Kemp, James Brannelly, Illya Swzec, 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 Lin: Paul is the master of melody and hook riff lines, usually sung in his native language. Paul started off with the first song he ever wrote, a tale from a fantasy called "*Tales From Paradise*". Driven by downstrokes on the guitar it has a soft energy that's flowing and melodic. I like the "Who o a ho" part as its very catchy and memorable. A definite foot tapper with its super rhythm. Song number two was "*Wang-An-Li-Sheng (Four Character Friend)*" which was about a Chinese friend of Paul's. Such a great melody and delivery that Jocelin said was "very rhythmic." The intense delivery and tight chorus were so good even if I couldn't understand the lyrics. I like the use of the final chord as it sends a message. One of Paul's best songs, "*The Most Romantic Thing*" was his last for the night. I really like the rhythm, something Paul excels at in his material.



On top of that we have a superbly memorable melody line and phrasing with an almost heavy metal style riff that really kicks arse. The "Oho" and descending riff really end off this very powerful song. Once again Paul demonstrates that a brilliant song translates the emotion without even lyrical understanding. A fantastic performance to start the night off by Paul. [Paul Lin](#) on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Sparkle: Sparkle always comes across as the effervescent folk flower child from the 1960s. Her positive energy always comes through in her material. Sparkle's first song, "*You're My Rainbow*", is a good example with its light melodic folk delivery and interesting stop start phrasing. It's a song that Jocelin suggested, "reflected her sparkly dress." Sparkle's second song, "*Ghost*" was a 2-beat toe-tapper done using a claw hammer picking technique. The song is about relationships done in classic folk style. I like the dynamics from low to high all in a moody, minor feel. Sparkle's third song was "*Fireworks*" which once again used the stop start feel. Quite a strong, powerful song done in an "Operatic style" according to Jocelin. It had great rhythm and reminded me a little of "*Fire*" by the Crazy World Of Arthur Brown. The table of heavy drinkers particularly liked it. Somehow Sparkle snuck another one in, probably because at the time there weren't many performers. Her last song of the set was called "*Rock Star*" which had a 2-beat rhythm and a soaring vocal range. I like the chord changes that under lie the story of the relationship with the rock star. As usual an entertaining performance from the world of Sparkle.



Nina Lo Rizzo: This was the first time Nina had played her songs in public, so she was a little nervous and apprehensive. Nina started off with "*Storm Blowing*" which Jocelin reviewed as I had to go off and tune up: "You could feel the sorrow from her melody. 'Every cloud has a storm behind', this line resonated." I thought Nina had a Bob Dylan meets the Five Non-Blondes style with a great rhythm guitar. One suggestion is to read less and make more eye contact with the audience. Nina only played two songs so "*Walk Away*" was her final tune. With a folk strum and interesting chord changes there's a Neil Young atmosphere to this one. A lot more energetic in its drive you could see that Nina was getting into it, especially with its use of dynamic pauses. Most of us wished we had as strong a start to our first performances!



Gav Fitzgerald: Al Crew took on the review of this act, while John Chesher did the photography. Gav's first song was "*Wolf At The Door*", written about the competitors of the heart. Al wrote: "Locomotive Rock'n'Blues. Raw power vocals throbbing (Remember The Throb?), interspersed with cunningly, clever riffs – "There's another wolf at the door." Gav's second song was written in the throes of new love and called "*In Your Voice*". Al flourished: "A little more Ballad-ish this time. "In your voice" – great expressive, plaintive lyrics. Gav lets the audience know exactly how he feels which is very poignant. Gav's last song, "*Out In The Desert*", with its sparse, desolate themes prompted Al to note: "A dry guitar intro as arid as any desert you might care to name but it's a really cool song. You never have a problem knowing what Gav's lyrics mean – the thought are crystal clear as if they were carved out of granite." Many thanks Al for the commentary and John for the images. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Jocelin Chan: The lady with the lyrics and melody that tells it all from the heart. Her first song about her life as a community pharmacist is called *"More Than Just A Drug Dealer"*. With a great rhythm and superb vocals that enhance an especially catchy melody. Such illustrative lyrics about the daily customer interactions of a pharmacist that the complete package got an appreciative crowd reaction. People love songs that come from experience that tell it like it is. The *"Beauty And The Beast"* start made the unknowing believe that they were going to be listening to a cover, especially with Jocelin's crystal clear delivery. However, it morphs into Jocelin's own composition, *"There's No Fairytale"*. A juxtaposition between reality and the fantasy world of fairytales – "Prince Charming won't exist if he doesn't have cash!" Are we teaching our children the wrong ideals by using fairytales? This song also gained a strong crowd endorsement. Jocelin's third song was a newer one called *"How To Be Human Today"*. This another song with a catchy melody and a strong chorus that mixes the themes of "Highway -to hell" and "Stairway to heaven." This was another one that roused the crowd's enthusiasm, especially as the song is very kick along with a hooky chorus. The maiden of melody has done it again with a stunning performance of her songs. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Donna Tilley: Donna is a newcomer to the Society Stage but delivers her material poise and maturity. Starting off with *"Dancing Girl"*, with its darker minor key folk feel that has a slight Gothic edge. Donna has a strong vocal with a unique tone – those sorts of tones everyone wishes they had. This song was so well delivered that it was signed, sealed and impacted the audience, a great start. Donna then reminded everyone that yesterday was Mother's Day as she led us into *"Would Not Take You In"*. The song has a superb melody with a Bluesy edge and a 2-beat rhythm. Jocelin said "Good song!" at least three times. A country Blues with a darker minor tone. Donna's last song of the night was *"Bittersweet Tears"* which had Country flavours once again – you can almost a fiddle playing in the background. With Donna's forceful vocal and persuasive melody had Jocelin clapping along. Donna gave us such a strong performance that we hope to hear her again at future Society Concerts. [Donna Tilley on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Al Crew: Al was backed by **Russell Neal** forming a brilliant duo that enhanced Al's songs to the extreme. Starting off with the classic *"I Don't Love You Anymore"* with its full-on Country Western energy. Detailing the problems with relationships and their ups & downs. Russell's riffs really add a definite spice enhancement to the songs' delivery. A different take on the usual love song, with its positive chorus endings that twist the song around so well – "I don't love you anymore, I don't love you any less." It shows how gifted a lyric writer Al really is, so simple yet so telling. Add to the flavour are a super melody and that juxtaposition. The next track out of the gates is a fairly new one, but it really heads the pack, called *"Jesus Whiskey"*. Starting with a stunning rolling riff from Russell that's a hook unto itself we venture into such a top song you'll be singing along yourself – "Jesus whiskey, two birds one stone." This is fast approaching the finish line as one of the crowd's absolute favourites! Al's last song was *"Unmarking Love"* started with fantastic slide work from Russell. Lyrics about a relationship breakup in small doses. It's the Blues but done Country style. Jocelin was thumping my back in rhythm as a drum to this one. "Heavens above, what were we thinking of...turns out, turns out we were unmaking love." Once again, the dynamic duo of Al and Russell have upped the ante so that each following act has to work harder to capture the audience. [Al Crew on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Jae Magsipoc: Jae came to entertain us with his talented perceptions of the world. He seemed to be in high spirits today as he launched each song with a smile. This was especially true of *"Reaching Highest"*, which was a new original song, first time played to an audience. The song had a strong chorus with high and low vocalisations, emphasising the dynamics that gave the song a refreshing edge. The crowd was singing the chorus along with him after only a few listens. The drive came from Jae's unique stop start rhythm while the vocal tones have shades of Rodriguez mixed with Joe Camilleri in it. A great song sung with a lot of happy confidence. Jocelin was singing it again after Jae had finished it. Jae's second song of the night was *"One Part People"* which featured a lively strong delivery. I liked the repeated verse sections in a once again Rodriguez folk style. There was a great use of vocal dynamics that reminded me of The Cranberries. Jae's last song was his classic, *"Wanderers"* which featured a strong chordal start. Jae shows his skills in using a good verse melody to lead the listener into the chorus which had the crowd singing along. It's such a powerful, insistent chorus that I can hear a "ghost keyboard player" in the background. Jae has treated the audience to a smorgasbord of musical songwriting which captures the ears of all. [Jae Magsipoc on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section



John Chesher: Long time SSA supporter and previous President John Chesher treads many of the open mic nights around town so has years of experience in presenting his material. This means his songs are so well polished in performance they positively gleam. This is true of *"Generations Changing"* written about how his late father's mannerisms come out in John's children although they never met. A beautiful chordal experience that creates an atmosphere of wonder, that the "circle of life" is a real thing not just some philosopher's' musings. Add that observational occurrence to a stunning melody and forthright playing and you have a song for the ages that many will experience. Saying some words are like chewing on a nice piece of steak, really satisfying in a visceral way. The word that activated John's sense was "harbinger" – "a person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another." So, the song *"Harbinger"* was born and developed. John plays the piece with much verve and passion that highlights the edge of darkness that the lyrics bring. There's a sense of impending doom, or destruction, in the delivery. Maybe it's the heavy



Bluegrass feel that reminds me of the “harbinger” effect in the movie “*Deliverance*”? One way, or another, the atmosphere had a twinge of dread to it with suits the lyrics perfectly. I was a player at the Excelsior Hotel when John set the “homework” for the songwriters for the following Monday night. The theme for the “homework” was “Mondays” and I dutifully wrote one and performing it the following week. However, John, ever being the leader, brought in his “homework” which wiped everyone else’s off the stage! It was “*Not Just Any Old Monday*”, about the breakup of his marriage which had just happened. So full on and emotive it captures everything about a relationship collapse, the grief, the anger, the sadness, the freedom, the emptiness, the road just changed, everything in one song. The whole kaleidoscope of such a big life shift is backed by chords that say it all. Even the “not wanting to let go” plaintive cry of “You’ll always be my friend” has a distinct finality to it. If you wanted just one song of John’s that shows his brilliance as a songwriter this one is a definite contender. A super set of classics tonight, John. [John Cheshner on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section. Apologies to John as there were some technological issues during his set and the camera cut off parts of the set.

Kevin Brocherie: I haven’t seen Kevin before so I’m assuming he’s a first timer to the Society stage. Kevin did two originals with the middle song being a cover. He started off with “*The Rules Of The World*” which was played in a folk style strumming. A good start had to be interrupted as his guitar started having problems, so he borrowed



Russell’s guitar which had a much stronger delivery – word to the wise, Kevin, either a new guitar, or a replacement battery! I was my turn to get drinks, so Jocelin took up the scribe’s pen and wrote:

“The song has a strong rhythm along with the strumming. A very folk song live.” We had a break for the next song as we don’t cover covers on a songwriter’s night. Then into “*Apologies*” which also

went down the folk pathway in a song for all the questions. When the chorus hits it hits strong and memorable grabbing the listener. The lively rhythm also adds to the flavours that are truly tasty. A couple of great songs, Kevin, and we hope to hear your original material again. [Kevin Brocherie on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section



Emma Driver: Emma is quite a favourite of those who play the Captain Cook it seems. Starting off with her first song of the night



entitled, “*Don’t Believe The Song*”, which featured her great toned vocal – Jocelin wrote, “Like a warm, aural bath.” This was backed by a tastefully picked guitar lending the song a folk fashion style and a super melody.

The audience was very appreciative of Emma’s performance. This was soon followed by “*Who Makes The Marks?*” where the melody and vocal were very strong in an Eva Trout style. There are slight jazz influences in the tones, but with a strong Aussie accent. Super imagery as the marks are on her personality. What and who impacts your development as you grow. Then the last song, “*My Heart Don’t Mind At All*” had

a change in tuning and a drive down some Bluesy rolling blues with lines like, “That man is in my heart, and my eyes don’t mind at all.” There are shades of Jenny Morris in Emma’s tone with this one. Great rhythmical blues that grabs the attention. Emma has already picked up a fan base of admirers and they really appreciated tonight’s performance. I’d say she even picked up many more tonight! [Emma Driver on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section



Kenneth D’Aran: Ken strode onto the stage with his trusty Takamine Classical guitar and told us to “*Listen*”. The light atmospheric start that develops as the song’s dynamics blossom. The softer verses have a 60’s feel, while the off-beat use is great between on the guitar and vocals. The super melody flows like a river until the scat vocal part which works well like boulders in the river’s flow. One of Ken’s better songs which he says is “All about nothing to say.” What followed is one of Ken’s classics, “*The Blame Game*” which starts off with a Boz Scaggs like beginning. Smooth and fluid as it investigates the social problem of why



“It’s so easy to blame” in a jazz format. I like how it uses a tier system of blame, wherein each level of Society blames the one below. The song features great chordal and melody changes in an almost Tango like feel. There’s a superb build throughout the song until the brilliant outro riff. Lastly is Ken’s song about aging, “*While I Still Have Wings*”, which starts off with a melodic solo riff, then the vocal melody follows the riff a la Les Misérables. A total celebration of still being able to do things in life even though you can feel the icicles of age starting to grow, draining energy. Ken’s vocal tones in this song are reminiscent of Cat Steven’s material. As usual, a superb performance from a Society stalwart. [Kenneth D’Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section



Russell Neal: Russell always likes to end off the night if there is time and tonight was no different. Russell was wondering what to do when an audience member called out, “*There Goes My Baby*”. A great pop song, but with lyrics some may question as it sounds like the theme song for a pimp but was actually written about a stay-at-home mate whose girlfriend worked in the markets. Russell wrote the song from the viewpoint of his mate. The song is very sing



along as it has a super melody. The middle eight totally changes direction – “When she gets home...” before coming back to the chorus. “She always tries to please” has Russell shaking his head at his mate’s laziness. Quite an observational song if you listen closely to the lyrics. There’s a real Medieval, King Henry the 8th, feel to “*You Know Where I Want To Be*.” Think of love in the 12th Century and an atmospheric riff. I get the imagery of castle walls, baked suckling pig and swans as a King looks adoringly at a Lady In Waiting. “Just give me tonight” is an

entreaty extreme. Is this lust with courtly manners? Full of lines like “If wishes were horses,” or “You know how I feel?” After two serious songs its time for Russell to give the people what they really want – bawdy humour – in the form of “*The Lady Loves Women*.” Russell was joined by Linda Neagrie on backing vocals. A very humorous ballad about running into an ex-girlfriend who it would seem things were heating up again “until she introduced me to her partner, Jane.” This then adds a different twist to the relationship memories – “She’s in her post heterosexual phase.” As well, they want to have a baby, with the song’s protagonist being the prospective father and the humorous ideas that prompts. The chorus is so sing along the whole pub tends to join in the uproarious choir and ends both Russell’s set well, but also the May Society Concert. <https://youtu.be/CzFr8z7QFuI> Russell Neal on Stage – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section

