

Society Concert – Dunkirk Hotel 13/10/25

Ground Floor 205 Harris St, Pyrmont

The October **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 13th of October there were ten players booked with all 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 Linda Beagrie, Jack Peck, Kate Liu, Jae Magsipoc, Illya Szewc, 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.

The Monday nights had moved back upstairs to the second floor where we started. Personally, I preferred it downstairs as you have to play well and loud to get the crowd of drunks to pay attention to you. However, they'll reward you with heartfelt applause and revelry if you can. Upstairs suits the folkies and quieter players as they don't have to work so hard. However, it is more realistic as a player to play and win a crowd over with your performance.

I remember former Society member, Alan Caswell, used to berate the audience if they didn't quietly listen to his songs. My thoughts at the time are the same as now, as an entertainer and a songwriter you are testing your material with a live audience. If the songs can cut it then they are keepers, if not then they might need more work. I've used this idea to test out new songs many times. I now video my performances, as does Jocelin, to see how songs and the audience's appreciation of them work. You can actually hear when the song has a dull spot as the crowd reaction is different.

Jocelin and 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 off indulging in things of the ukelele, so **John Chesher** was our sound engineer and MC for the night. As Russell was plucking four strings there was no whiteboard available, so John retreated back into open mic history to use a brown paper bag to write the performer's bill

John Chesher: As usual for a John Chesher run night, John takes to the stage first to check if all the P.A.'s bits and pieces are working properly with no glitches. It's strange being back on the 2nd floor, like a fish out of water, but it felt that way when we moved downstairs originally. One good improvement is that the second floor now has a proper elevated stage. John started the night with "*Circles Around The Moon*". The eerie, atmospheric picking at the start of the song brings out the emotions of a true story which is definite and passionate. "A song for Angie" who was John's girlfriend when he was young. John couldn't catch up one weekend due to family commitments, so she decided to leave permanently, which took John many years and with much help to get over the grief. This song was written as part of the healing process - "Can't say see you soon". The imagery of that cutting grief is so strong you can almost taste it - "Your smiling eyes hang around my mind, like circles around the moon." Even after forty years John ended the song with "A song for Angela Polaski," gone but not forgotten. After that turmoil filled soliloquy John took us on a journey through his musical past with "*Some Of The Licks I've Learnt*". I like the ambiguity of the word "Some" as it could easily be replaced by the word "Sum" and still keep the context. This was intentional by John as he's a master at word plays. The extended solo at the beginning of the song is a John Chesher idiom. For John playing guitar, these days, is like falling off a horse as in the past he'd "pair it from here and rip it from there." It's the ballad of how all of us are plagiarists to some point as we use riffs we've learnt from others in our own playing. All this with a some tasty riffage from John's hands. John's last song of the initial set was "*Generations Changing*" which starts with a minor progression that flows through the subconscious. This is a song based on John's observations of his own children's behaviours and how they mirrored John's dad, their grandfather. The remarkable thing is they met their grandfather as he'd died before they were born! "Perhaps in the DNA?" The bass riff works well with John's busy melodic fingers - "In our hearts we are all the same." Beautifully played and sung with very thought-provoking lyrics. A good way to end off the start of the Society Concert Night, John. [John Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the [Member's Section](#).

Sparkle: Every venue need its characters and the Society Concert at the Dunkirk Hotel is no exception. Sparkle, with her effervescent personality is one of those. Her positive, lively energy makes many a punter smile at her performances. Sparkle welcomes all the "cool guys and cool girls" in the audience and proceeded to take us into "*A World Of Dreams*". With a lightly picked guitar and highly persuasive melodies Sparkle takes us through those special places in her mind's eye. We all have those locations that back up our daydreams and create a smile on our faces as we roam through their enticing patterns. Maybe it's been a session of too much daydreaming so now Sparkle "*Can't Sleep*." I like the punchy, precise phrasing of "I get no sleep". No sleep as he'd stolen her heart. Done in a 2-beat picking style that's almost Gothic in approach it details that sometimes emotions can overcome our baser instincts. There was an



audience request for “*Don’t Fight With A Bus*” so Sparkle happily complied with the call. Coming from one time Sparkle was coming off a bus and had a terrible fall. This accident was the inspiration for his humorous song, full of English style comedy and phrasing – “I can say I fell off the back of a bus.” Think of how a proper English teacher would pronounce words, especially the rounded vowel sounds with lines like “Don’t cuss or concuss” and “Think I’ll take a course in self-defence.” The song ended with an almost operatic crescendo and the applause was enthusiastic and loud. A good delivery of your songs tonight, Sparkle.

Cameron Alcorn: Some people have a definite gift for a particular genre, and I think Cameron has this in soul folk as he has a very unique soul vocal that’s absolutely amazing, but prefers folk as the style he sings in. Starting off with “*I Just Want You*” written for a special person “who isn’t here tonight.” Starting with a fluid style of picking that’s emotive in itself the Cameron sings and envelopes the room with that warm depth of persuasive soul that grabs all the ears within singing distance. The superb falsetto chorus takes the feel into another level altogether. Add to that Cameron’s brilliant lyrics that have a Neil Finn ethos, and you have a songwriting storm that’ll rollercoaster most other songwriter. I like how Cameron gets his inspiration from the world around him. He related to the audience how “*What If Life Was Contrived?*” came about after watching the movie, “*The Truman Show*”. The lyrics pose the question about what would happen if we were controlled totally by others. The performance of this song really demonstrates how Cameron uses his full vocal range to add dynamics. Superb lyrics about the situation – “Some things aren’t meant to be.” Cameron’s last song of the night was “*Window Sill*” which was written after reading Haruki Murakami’s book, “*Norwegian Wood*”. The novel is a nostalgic coming-of-age story told from the perspective of Toru Watanabe, a college student navigating relationships with two different women and dealing with the emotional fallout of a past suicide. As Cameron said it has some dicey material in it. I wish the guitar was louder to balance out Cameron’s vocals. However, Cameron uses the dynamics well building as the song progresses then dropping back down. The vocal inflections are the hooks in this song – “Ain’t it funny, been waiting my whole life.” Another superb set of soul folk songs from a unique talent! [Cameron Alcorn on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Kerrie Ford: Blue Mountains style down to visit the “Big Smoke” as Kerrie revels in her favoured genre. Starting off with “*Keep On Loving You*” we are taken on a journey of a pure country atmosphere – I can almost hear those bellbirds sing. With a classic 1950’s vibe, especially in the lyrics, the song has a brilliant chorus that’s very catchy. It reminds me of the material that they used to play on 2VM (Voice of Moree, our nearest town) which was a mix of the latest pop songs and the greatest country classics. So, the Beach Boys would be followed by Tom T Hall, The Beatles by Tammy Wynette, the Rolling Stones followed by Marty Robbins, etc, etc. So, you’d get this blend of fantastic songwriting entering your ears and developing your musical tastes. I’d say Kerrie sounds she’s had a similar upbringing on country radio and distils them into her songs. Kerrie told us she’d been on a London/Europe NAFC bus tour twenty years ago which influenced her writing “*Cathedrals & Castles*”. I know what Kerrie means as I did a Trafalgar bus tour of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales followed by an I think an Intrepid tour through Europe. I knew well the meaning of “A.B.C” which could mean “Another bloody cathedral”, or “Another bloody castle.” So, all the imagery I totally understood and empathised with. Done in a true Country & Western manner that’s very flavoursome in a full-on approach. Kick your heels up as you head into Rome, or Paris, or Berlin, etc, etc. I think there’s a Definite Buddy Holly influence on Kerrie’s last song, “*Mother Bird*”. This is the title song from Kerrie’s CD and was written after her neighbour bemoaned the fact that her children had grown up and were leaving home. So, Kerrie wrote the song about life after kids as she sang, “I was having the time of her life,” after kids departed. A super strong chord with great phrasing that’s very catchy – “It’s ti-i-me for the mother bird to fl-i-y”. Kerrie’s song have a great dose of sing-along-a-ness that all great songs do so I hope we hear them again at another Society Concert. [Kerrie Ford on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Gav Fitzgerald: Then it’s Gav’s turn to take on the limelight. Thanks to Al Crew for doing the reviews and I think to Jocelin for the photography. Gav started out with his question about the wages of the top executives, “Are they worth it?”, in the song, “*Hey, Mr Executive*”. Al muses with his words, “How do you sleep at night” – a powerful expletive focusing on the most powerful men in the room who these days by reputation are some of the most unpopular. Teaching Gav’s trademark attributes – powerful guitar and power lyrics – “Please tell me the truth.” Then Gav said the next song, “*Strike While The Iron Is Hot*” is about living life with less regrets. Al put that pen to paper: “There’s a distinctive riff/chord formation that drives this song from the beginning to the end. There’s no falling asleep while this song is up on stage! There’s a nice vibrato in the vocals at just the right point to emphasise the lyrics. The precise ending accentuates the decisiveness of Gav’s driving rhythm and lyric patter.” Gav’s last song is a favourite for many in the crowd, especially Linda. The riff of “*The Fascinator*” hits the ears and people start tapping or moving along to its hypnotic rhythm. As Al phrased: “It’s impossible to nod off when Gav is on the stage – “The ultimate groover!” Again, there’s the ever-present driving/thriving guitar perfectly balanced with a softer, almost acoustic interlude before regathering for a power push crescendo. A tasty bit of lead here and there also.” Thanks again for the reviews, Al, and for the images, Jocelin. [Gav Fitzgerald on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Jocelin Chan: Then the songbird of the Society, Jocelin, then took to the microphone as though it was her true home. Starting off with the philosophical, “*How To Be A Human Today*”, with its full-on decision between Heaven & Hell prompted John to cry out “Well, that’s your decision!” Lyrics that ask what does it mean as one religion’s hell is another religion’s heaven. We are all living on Earth trying to be our best and everyone has an opinion of where you are going to wind up. These ideas are brought out in superb lyrics and with Jocelin’s fluid, melodic vocals that both question and entertain. “*Part Of My Memory*” has a really sad origin as one of Jocelin’s friends passed away with so many shared memories that won’t be shared again. It really is goodbye in a song as that friend is now just a memory like fading photographs. The strong hook is the term her friend called herself, “Flamingo

girl”, after losing her leg to the cancer that eventually took her away. The lyrics detail all the fun they had studying together at Uni, travelling around New Zealand and even the weird cocktails they’d laughingly drank. The most passionate line is “I miss you Flamingo Girl” which is so sad and heartfelt in its grief at losing a close friend. It is amazing how grief can bring out the songs in us all and they can be our best. Jocelin then returns to her memories for her last song, “*Every Time I Think About Home*”. Pure nostalgia for her home city of Hong Kong that she last lived in full time nearly fourteen years ago. Each time she visits it changes from the place she used to know, the people, the places, etc. This is the story of a life journey beyond the norm of her culture so she’s always looking back and looking forward. Heavily strummed its “Not the perfect part of me.” The song has a mesmerising chorus that’s both haunting and passionate. The melody behind it is particularly sublime and digs its emotional hooks in especially in the repeated outro that’s “changing day, by day.” Once again Jocelin has taking us on an expedition through worlds of different emotions in a boat made of melody and propelled by passionate lyrics. Thanks again, Jocelin for being a great entertainer. [Jocelin Chan on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Al Crew: As Al’s normal sidekick, Russell, is off ukuleling with Deb, **John Chesher** took over the backing role. Al started with the classic “*She Came From Texas*”, the story of an ill-fated love affair for the proverbial “ships in the night” that could have been everything both wanted, but they wanted their dreams more. Both were “Looking for something...”, “.....that slipped through their hands.” The imagery is superb, especially the references to Room 207, that pivotal for the emotional journey, especially when “she became a big star” she still visits Room 207 to remember the loss. Al is such a brilliant lyricist and melody writer that he captures the story of two people’s pathos so eloquently. The subtleties abound in this song, “They did all the things that new lovers do,” says so much without being crass, or crude. I like Al’s next song, “*Can’t Get Enough*”, backed by John’s singing guitar work. The song is a list song with the verses being all the can dos, with the chorus being the juxtaposition of the situation. “I can have too many whiskies, but I can’t have enough of you”, or “I can’t see enough of you.” I like the perpetual motion of the rhythm and the rhyme. Not sure if I’ve heard this one before, but as usual with Al’s



stuff it’s a great inclusion to his vast repertoire. Al’s last song, backed by John’s distinctive lead style, is one I regularly keep singing to myself at different times. Jocelin does the same. Yes, it’s the absolute classic “*Dancing With My Memories*”, which Linda joined in on backing harmonies. A definite crowd favourite that everyone within hearing distance joined in on – “Three steps forwards, two steps back to see, I’m just dancing with my memories.” The melody, the phrasing, just about everything makes this the perfect song. The lyrics themselves seem to sing – “If you’re pushed, don’t give an inch.” When Al finished the last note, the crowd is silent for a bit, the unleashes a cacophony of appreciation. One day people will talk about the great Al Crew, songwriter extraordinaire, who used to play these little open mic nights in Sydney. Then, those who appreciated him will be dancing in their memories. [Al Crew on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.

Rory Faithfield: Last time we saw Rory at a Society Concert he was heading off to Ireland which is his second home apparently. It seems the Gaelic experiences have influenced his folk style of writing. I’d heard “*Your Eyes Adjust To The Dark*” before and knew it was a great song, but Rory explained it further tonight as it’s a song about when you realise what’s actually happening in a situation. Don’t with a light strum you can tell the influence of “*All Along The Watchtower*” – knowing Rory’s material I’d say it was the Dylan version rather than the Hendrix version (Then again, how Dylan now plays it is like the Hendrix version!) AS Rory said, “It’s my coded message song.” There is an almost Neil Finn flair with the lyrics while the chorus is so strong, melodic and sing-along-able. Such a brilliant piece of songwriting. Rory’s next song, “*Window In My Mind*”, was done from the perspective of Bobby Sands, who’d been born at the start of “The Troubles”, and joined the IRA at an early age. The poets and musicians led the rebellion, while Booby Sands was “back home in Derry.” Even a lot of the convicts sent to Australia were political prisoners to suppress the Irish rebels. Bobby Sands died while on a hunger strike and Rory has tried to capture the feelings of a person on their last legs in this situation – “My heart is free, got a window in my mind.” A great song, full of passionate pathos and complex lyrical thoughts. Rory seems to capture the atmosphere of the tragedy and trials of the Irish peoples well. Rory said he was a bit nervous with the next song, “*Click My Fingers*”, as it was a newie. Rory said part of this comes from his use of polyrhythms in the Key of D. We are stumming in capoland as we explore that “love is a curse” as the great lyrical rhythm propels us to “love is a blue sky.” It’s that juxtaposition lovers find themselves in after many years together, where one minutes the other person is driving you mad, then minutes later your hearts breaks with how much you love them. They say true love is when you accept the other person in the relationship’s foibles and love them for those as well – No body quite like you” sings Rory. Once again Rory shows his depth of experience and emotional warmth, he delivers his material with. Another superb performance tonight, Rory. [Rory Faithfield on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member’s Section.



Kate Witsen: Another newcomer to the Society stage Kate did two originals and one cover. As we don’t review covers being a songwriter’s night, we really appreciated Kate’s efforts in presenting her own material when she found out the theme of the open mic Kate’s first foray was a song she’d written during the 2020 CoVid lockdown when she’d become depressed called “*Awaken*”. The song featured strong, rhythmical strumming and a great vocal tone. I particularly liked the vocal build as the song progressed as though going through the process of the brain waking up. Kate uses her vocal vibrato very well and its quite controlled. This leads the listener into a strong chorus that grabs the ears, especially with the “Yeah ha hea” part. Kate wrote her second original song, “*Fade Into The Wind*”, when she was single and it’s a song of yearning. Using the capo adds a nice touch to the picking which morphs into strumming. There’s an evocative, mysterious feel to the song. I especially like the melody and Kate’s use of phrasing. Kate also uses great dynamics in the passion of her delivery as though there’s a biorhythm of her desires that ebb and flow. Combine all the above with a unique vocal delivery and its an exquisite listening experience. Kate really demonstrated her live performance skills



well on the Society stage and we hope to hear her again in the near future. [Kate Witsen on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

Ken D'Aran: Who else could end off the performer's bill but the perennial, Ken D'Aran? Like in the olden days people would go out for dinner then go to a Jazz Club to finish the night we have our jazz at the end ready for a whiskey. Ken started off with "Time Bossa" with its picked jazz in a Brazilian cut, with its phrasing being smooth, almost Sade like in its vocals. The laid-back feel emanates the spirits of Deam Martin but in a true Ken format. Jazz guitar chomping with a running thumb bass supporting extremely catchy lyrics and we have a songwriting samba of words not steps. Ken knows how to play the "cool dude" musically very well. From Brazil to Argentina, specifically Buenos Aires (Or BA to the locals) where we have a song written by Ken in 2017 called "Tangled Tango". This political comment works as well today as when it was written, as men who desire power at any cost still exist – "I've got the biggest gun of them all!" In this song Ken delves into the full spectrum of these narcissistic war mongers from racism to power plays, to inflated infantile egos, to weapons of mass destruction, its all there delivered by Ken's humorous take on them – "I don't know if you don't know, there's a crisis going on." We all smile at the song, but that edge of fear is ever present as the lunatics control the asylum. Ken is brilliant in assaying a situation then turning it into a brilliant song. Both a protest song and also an observational song such as "Blame Game". Who takes the responsibility when the shit hits the fan? That's the theme of the "Blame Game". It takes real guts to get up and say, "Yeap, I'm the drongo when stuffed up," but few individuals are brave enough to do this. This idea is all done with fluid melodic phrases on the guitar – Ken is the King of the nylon guitar – that have Spanish origins, being emotive and deeply passionate at the same time. Then those famous chord sing "It's so easy to blame" before we are treated to a great riff. Such a stylish melody that sounds both old and new at the same time. Linda called out a request for "Winburndale Rivulet" which is about a small river near Bathurst that flows for just over fifty kilometres before entering into the Macquarie River. Ken visited the rivulet when he was much younger and again recently which inspired the song. A place, a memory composed of the senses experienced by the eyes, the ears, the touch and the smell all compressed into the lyrics of the song – "not quite a river and not a creek." Your imagination can see the white-water rapids, the pebbles, the sand and the eventual smooth waters flowing in a languid fashion. The casuarinas make music in the wind as the pied currawong calls to the sky preflight. Last visited forty years ago but much the same today, never changing like human lives where we are born, develop, become adults and eventually pass on, but the Winburndale Rivulet just keeps on flowing through time. Such an easy paced song and a great end to a super set from Ken. [Ken D'Aran on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Even though the official Society Concert had finished there was still time for a couple more original songs:

John & Linda Chesher: "Christian Companion" is a song that John used to perform very regularly with the Moron Ball'nTackle Choir, but only Linda was representative this time. This was a cowrite with a friend of John's called Jerome back in 1972. The ballad of an encounter while the pair were out busking back in Canada. The whole lyric is basically what the old guy they encountered said to them – "I don't want no bingo woman, not one of your damn cold cigarette girls, I have a mind for a Christian companion, and I pray for her till the good Lord comes." The people in the crowd who know this song sing along in a lusty fashion. John's response was "I had to tell him; I love my music." It's amazing the genesis of some songs. I really like it when the performing songwriter alludes to where the song originated as I think it connects the audience more. Linda added those necessary backing harmonies and hand movements that are crucial for the Moron Ball'nTackle Choir. [John & Linda Chesher on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.



Rory Faithfield: Rory was invited up for another original in the form of "Is It Too Late, Too Late." John joined him on lead and 2nd guitar for a song I haven't heard before I think? "Is it too late to be your darling somehow?" is a great chorus that's very sing along. There's a great build in the vocal presence with lines like "Listen to your sweetheart," and "Maybe its not over yet." Reminds me a bit of being the opposite to Cher's "Believe" where she sings "Do you believe in life after love?" John does a sterling job of backing Rory. A great way to end the Society Concert Night. [Rory & John on Stage](#) – The full video is available for members in the Member's Section.

