

# LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

AUSTRALIAN guitarist Rupert Boyd, who studied in Canberra with Timothy Kain, recently won the Eisenberg-Fried Concerto Competition at the Manhattan School of Music, which led to a performance of Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* with the Manhattan School of Music Chamber Symphony, conducted by Lawrence Leighton Smith. His performance was greeted with four standing ovations. Boyd is currently working on his second masters degree at the Manhattan School of Music and he also performs with the Piazzolla Quintet.

Similarly, guitarist Giacomo LaVita, was the winning soloist of the annual Mannes Concerto Competition. As a reward, he is having a performance of the *Aranjuez* concerto recorded with the Mannes Orchestra with David Rosenmayer conducting. LaVita, who has studied with Ricardo Cobo and Frederic Hand, earned both his Masters and Bachelors degrees at Mannes.

On a cold winter evening with plumes of steam rising along the streets of East Village, I'd dropped by an Italian restaurant to catch an 11 PM performance of LaVita and his guitar duo partner Bret Williams. It was their first ever restaurant gig. Williams, who used to live in an apartment above the nearby, famed McSorley's Old Alc House (where Abraham Lincoln once drank a pint), told me that he had spent three years dreaming about getting the chance to play regularly in a New York restaurant. Williams and



Rupert Boyd: winner of the Eisenberg-Fried Concerto Competition.

LaVita had scoured the town with demo CDs before landing this evening date in the small basement wine bar of the restaurant lit with flickering candles, red silk fringed lampshades and approximately thirty diners.

The duo sat less than a toss of garlic bread away from their audience with a rig consisting of two cabinet-sized speakers, amplified guitars and an audio system called the Gigmaster, a large box of knobs and flashing LED lights, resembling something closer to submarine sonar technology. Appropriately enough, with the reverb and feedback, their guitars sounded as if they played underwater with a bit of punchy sustain. The amplification was a necessary evil, given the overpowering chatter of the diners.

Aside from the sound issues, the duo played pieces by Albéniz, de Falla and Ginastera admirably in sync. Unfortunately, they fell prey to a first timer restaurant-gig hazard: a table full of drunken partygoers. The chief miscreant was an inebriated party girl who looked as if she had fallen straight out of Toulouse Lautrec's 'In a Private Room at Le Rat Mort' with a loud, Midwestern-inflected quack prone to uttering bratty inanities. When the girl became aware that she was on the receiving end of many flinty stares and unholstered index finger pistols, her table giddily ramped up its rudeness level until one of the guitarist's girlfriends stood up and unleashed a petite-sized ball of fury that bordered tearful pleading.



Bret Williams and Giacomo LaVita: serenading to an Italian Restaurant.

'These are concert musicians. Try to be respectful and keep your voices to the background.'

'We had reservations,' was the slurry reply. 'You're the background to us.'

The duo resumed their playing.

'Strum, strum, strum,' someone heckled from that table, sounding rather Pee Wee Herman-like.

A hush fell over the room. Williams lifted the microphone to chin level, strummed the opening chord to the well-known birthday tune and sang, 'Eff you little birthday girl, eff you...'

Hell broke loose on both sides. Shirt sleeves rolled back and chairs shunted aside abruptly. Tempers barely subsided when management informed the guitarists they had two more pieces to play, which caused the rowdy table to erupt with jeers.

And at the end of their commendably focused performance, Williams and a nervous LaVita received a thunderous applause but probably not entirely for the reason any guitarist would like. As the revellers donned their jackets, their exit was punctuated by an unexpected round of applause of good riddance coming from those who had come specifically to see the guitarists perform.

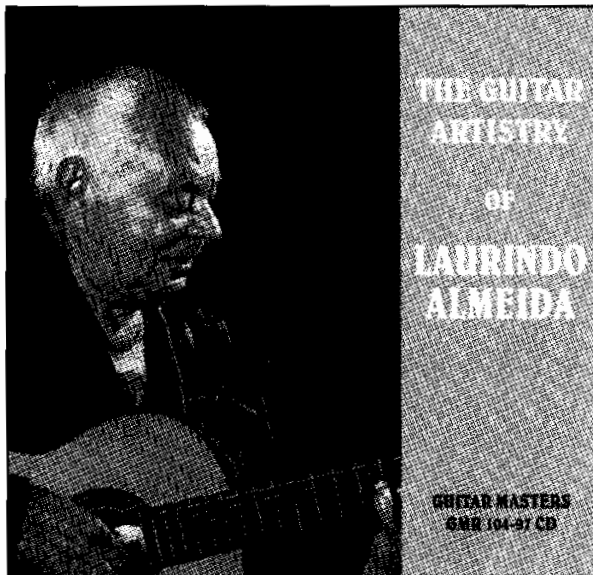
The waitress suggested the guitarists should not have chosen a busy weekend evening when

the restaurant had a number of dinner reservations. Mannes Masters student Jeremy Bass argued that if he, as a paying customer, is having his dining experience ruined by a couple of louts, then it's within reason to expect management to ask louts to leave rather than placate them. It's also my opinion that you cannot expect a restaurant to be the same as a concert hall because the primary function of a restaurant is to serve food.

I used to play regularly at a Middle Eastern restaurant in Hell's Kitchen. Some view these kinds of gigs as a way to be paid a meal and small fee to practice but my goal at the time was to play the guts out of the guitar regardless of the audience, its number, inevitable noise and distraction. I'd hauled through snowstorms, played for the chef and waiters in an empty restaurant during the Yankees playoffs, and endured belly dancers ritually showered and stuffed with cash scurrying home past the homeless lined in cardboard boxes late at night behind Port Authority.

Eventually, I had to quit. It was on account of nearly stepping into a spattering of blood left behind in the bathroom by a table full of needle junkies who'd been the only customers in the restaurant on a slow night. At least they'd been quiet.

## From Guitar Masters Imports



### THE GUITAR ARTISTRY OF LAURINDO ALMEIDA

1 ... People (3:09) .....	Merrill & Styne
2 ... My Funny Valentine (3:28) .....	Rodgers & Hart
3 ... As Long As He Needs Me (2:18) .....	Bart
4 ... I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face (2:38) .....	Lerner & Lowe
5 ... Is It Really Me? (2:28) .....	Jones & Schmidt
6 ... Smoke Gets In Your Eyes (2:48) .....	Kern & Harbach
7 ... Little Girl Blue (3:19) .....	Rodgers & Hart
8 ... What Kind Of Fool Am I? (3:13) .....	Bricusse & Newley
9 ... Was She Prettier Than I (2:37) .....	Martin & Gray
10 ... The Sound Of Music (3:41) .....	Rodger & Hammerstein
11 ... The Most Beautiful Girl (3:03) .....	Rodgers & Hart
12 ... Laura (2:43) .....	Raskin
13 ... Mystified (2:57) .....	Almeida
14 ... Malagueña (2:40) .....	Lecuona
15 ... Staniana (2:28) .....	Almeida
16 ... Vals De Concerto (3:59) .....	Barrios Mangore
17 ... Insomnia (3:03) .....	Almeida
18 ... Tea For Two (2:45) .....	Youmans & Caesar
19 ... Susto (2:29) .....	Almeida
20 ... Brilliance (2:51) .....	Almeida
21 ... Eñe-Eñe (3:04) .....	Traditional
22 ... Saudade (3:04) .....	Gnattali

Total Playing Time : 65:00

TRACKS 1-11 ORIGINALLY RELEASED ON THE LP RECORDING 'BROADWAY SOLO GUITAR'.

TRACKS 12-22 ORIGINALLY RELEASED ON THE LP RECORDING 'SUEÑOS'.

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