

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 Ale 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.