

# DOWNTOWN

## The Street Singer's Beat

## The Australian Guitarist From The Outback Of New York

by Steve Witt

Lloyd Carew-Reid, the Australian guitarist from the outback of New York has a perseverance and fortitude that demands admiration. For it is he who has taken on the M.T.A.'s (Metropolitan Transit Authority) policy of harassing and ticketing non-M.U.N.Y. (Music Under New York) musicians with a pit bull type grip that won't let go. At issue is freedom of speech in public places.

I met up with Lloyd in the large corridor of Grand Central Station as the morning rush was winding down. I leaned an elbow on my guitar case and listened as he played a slow and melodic piece of classical music. Later, I learned that it was Rodrigo's *Concerto de Aranjuez*.

After Reid finished the piece, he packed up and we walked to the Griddle Coffee Shop, which is next to the old waiting room.

"First of all," I said as we took a table, "I know this folk singer, Roger Manning, who is taking some of the credit anyway for changing the subway music laws. Can you comment on this?"

"Manning's case preceded mine and was important in that it resulted in a clear cut constitutional opinion handed down by a criminal court judge that knocked down a law. However, Roger's case brought on a new law, 'No entertainment for the purpose of soliciting'. My case actually changed the policy. That's why for the

last two years nobody has been ticketed."

"Is Grand Central Station part of the M.T.A.'s jurisdiction?"

"No it isn't. For this reason I only play Grand Central Station with a M.U.N.Y. pass."

"So you are a member of M.U.N.Y. now?"

"Yes. I auditioned on the balcony in Grand Central in front of seven or eight panelists in a reserved decision."

"You know, I was a charter member of M.U.N.Y. and stayed with it for two years, but I couldn't keep up with their constant re-auditions. It's a real pain."

We had been sitting for a while now and there was no sign of a waitress, so I walked over to the counter and asked a waitress to come to our table to take our order.

"Tell me about the M.T.A.'s new regulations," I said to Lloyd.

"Well, I think the M.T.A. will try to use the M.U.N.Y. program as a way of satisfying the courts' requirements for reasonable time, place, and manner regulations."

"I think the real issue is platform playing. The M.U.N.Y. spots are rarely good."

"Exactly. I see the platform not just as a subway platform, but as a platform that allows the launching of perhaps the purest form of being a musician," Reid said.

"I have to tell you I'm one of those musicians who don't bat an eye when I get a ticket. I just wait until the cop leaves and then I deposit them in the garbage."

"My view is you can't let the bastards get away with it," Lloyd said and smiled. "Throwing away tickets is accepting defeat in a sense, because it's allowing the M.T.A. to give you a criminal label, and therefore, for the whole community to accept that label."

The idea of me being a defeatist struck me hard. It made me think about my upbringing and about my decision to be an artist, and about my growth as a human being.

"Tell me about S.T.A.R.," I said.

"S.T.A.R., which stands for Subway Troubadors Against Repression, is a loosely knit group of subway musicians who are organizing against the M.T.A.'s plan to curtail freedom of speech."

It was getting late for finding an afternoon platform spot and both Lloyd and I were edgy to finish our talk. So we divided up the check and went our separate ways.

After leaving Reid, I stood for a minute among the homeless who were gathered in the waiting room of Grand Central Station, and gave our conversation some thought. I decided that S.T.A.R. was a worth-while organization and that it was perhaps time for me to stand up for my rights. However, I also reckoned, while heading for a subway platform, that throwing away tickets didn't necessarily make me a defeatist.