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## Queen of Contemporary Folk Christine Lavin recognized for songwriting

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Cabaret star Andrea Marcovicci, left, and Christine Lavin hold Lavin's ASCAP Foundation award.  
Fernando Leon

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[Arlo Guthrie](#) was the worthy winner of the [ASCAP Foundation](#) Champion Award at the Foundation's awards ceremony on Dec. 9, but not even Guthrie is as great a champion of contemporary folk music as [Christine Lavin](#).

The New York-based singer-songwriter, long regarded as the Queen of Contemporary Folk Music, was presented the Foundation's Jamie deRoy & friends Award, "for outstanding work and dedication to the craft of songwriting." But that's really not the half of it: In a 25-year career, she has released 20 solo albums (her latest is *Cold Pizza for Breakfast*), appeared on three *Four Bitchin' Babe* albums, and six compilation projects that she also produced.

But she's also a tireless promoter of other songwriters.

"I love songs and songwriters so much that I can't help but try to hook up singers with songs--and that gets me more jazzed than anything," Lavin said in a conversation following the ASCAP Foundation Awards. "When I hear a great song that hasn't found a big audience yet, I never give up on it."

Indeed, her current passion is "All-In-All," a David Buskin song written back in the early 1980s.

"I produced an issue of the *Fast Folk Musical Magazine* in 1985, and asked Raun MacKinnon to sing that song," Lavin recalled. "She did--a fantastic performance and recording that has only recently surfaced since Smithsonian Folkways took over *Fast Folk* and now has made all the back issues available on CD. I recently sent it to Andrea Marcovicci--'The Queen Of Cabaret'--who's currently doing a show at The Algonquin of [Johnny Mercer](#) songs, but preparing a show of all new songs. Even though 'All-In-All' technically isn't new, it is to 99.99 percent of the world--so it qualifies for consideration."

Marcovicci actually contacted Lavin about the song just as she was about to enter the Riverside Church for the [Mary Travers memorial](#) last month.

"I checked my email and there was one from Andrea asking for the sheet music--which she loved!" continued Lavin. "Walking into the church who do I see in one of the pews? David Buskin! So I blurted out to him, 'Andrea Marcovicci wants the sheet music to 'All-In-All'!' I realized that might not have been proper--in a church!--but then I figured, no, it's okay. Mary Travers is overseeing this, and she'd like it that this connection happened at her memorial!"

But “All-In-All” isn’t all.

“My two other new favorite songs are ‘Artiste Interrupted’ by Lou & Peter Berryman and ‘The Introvert Song’ by Deirdre Flint of the Four Bitchin’ Babes,” she declared. “I’ve been sending them around to likely candidates. ‘Artiste Interrupted’ might be the most difficult song a singer could ever tackle, and ‘The Introvert Song’ is perfect for a singer on the shy side--I sent it to a college theater program as the perfect song for a talented student who hasn’t developed stage confidence yet!”

Typical Lavin.

“These things I do for the love of good music since I don’t benefit personally if these hook-ups work--but it makes me feel so good,” she says. “It all goes back to Dave Van Ronk’s mantra: ‘When music of quality sells, it’s good for all of us.’ Amen!”

The late folksinger legend Van Ronk covered one of Lavin’s own most delightful songs, “Amoeba Hop.” A close-up look at microscopic dancers, it has been used as a teaching aid in schools and was made into a children’s book in 2003 by illustrator Betsy Franco-Feeney, that won acclaim from The International Society of Protistologists and the “Best Book” award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Other Lavin songs have been likewise immortalized, and include her 1988 album titletrack “Good Thing He Can’t Read My Mind,” used as the lead song in *Sex, The Musical*, a revue about relationships produced in Eugene, Oregon. More recently astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson’s *The Pluto Files: The Rise And Fall Of America’s Favorite Planet* includes the complete lyrics to her song “Planet X,” which details Pluto’s history and planetary status debate in rhyme.

“I’m hard at work now on a new song called ‘Name That Cow!,’ inspired by a New York Times article that states if you give a cow a name, her milk output increases by six percent,” Lavin said. “I never know where song ideas are going to come from next, but when they appear, I run with them—and I’m hoping to break it in at my next show.”

Lavin’s shows, by the way, now include knitting circles. A dedicated beginner who has a short piece about knitting in a post-9/11 world (“Learning To Knit At Fifty”) in the book *KnitLit Too: Stories From Sheep to Shawl...and More Writing About Knitting*, she invites fellow knitters to come early and join a knitting circle either in the venue’s lobby or backstage before the show. She hopes to attract more experienced participants to share their knowledge (knit shop owners, she notes, are given two free tickets for acting as “official co-host” of the knitting circle).

But she’s also an expert baton twirler. In fact, she used to dazzle audiences with a silent baton routine, accompanied to a hilarious tape of her thoughts spoken out loud.

And Lavin’s cooking skills are right up there with her songwriting. Just up on her web site is her original recipe for Barackolate Chip Cookies--“A cookie that

(finally!) represents ALL Americans: Democrats, Republicans, Independents--light ones, dark ones, beige ones, and of course, nuts."

The much-traveled folkie has baked them more than a dozen times for the cast of *South Pacific* at Lincoln Center, and before last year's presidential election served them to audiences in Asheville, North Carolina, Norfolk, and Vienna, Virginia.

"People were a bit surprised that Obama won North Carolina and Virginia--but I'm not!" Lavin tells web site visitors.