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Christine Lavin's memoir celebrates cold pizza, warm laughs

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“Cold Pizza for Breakfast”

It's Christine Lavin's favorite meal. It's also the name of her 20th album; and it's the name of her new book, subtitled “A Mem-wha??” (Tell Me Press, 408 pages, \$21.95).

The album dropped in November, and the book will be released June 1, but Lavin will have copies of both “Cold Pizzas” with her when she performs.

In addition to singing her famously funny songs, Lavin reads selections from the book, which spans her career and, as one editor remarked, “mentions every musician she ever met in her entire life.”

“That is so not true,” Lavin says, her trademark chuckle following quickly behind. “I only listed the good ones. If I listed the bad ones the list would have been a lot longer, but I didn't want to waste ink on bad stuff.”

Lavin has always been a champion of fellow folksingers, extolling their virtues in interviews; on radio shows; and at her own concerts.

One tale in “Cold Pizza” concerns her first meeting with longtime friend and fellow songwriter Cheryl Wheeler.

“I sent Cheryl a book,” Lavin says, “with a note that said, ‘Do you realize there's only one complete lyric in the entire book — and it's yours!’ ”

“I guess I like to write about other people more than myself,” the author says.

Lavin also rhapsodizes about White, who has essentially adapted his stand-up comedy routine into a music gig.

“He’s a blue-collar intellectual,” she raves. “He’s going to be a real discovery for people.”

In 2006, White wrote his own book, called “Memoirs of a C Student.”

Lavin says she read the first two pages and was prompted to start her book, which eventually morphed into “Cold Pizza.”

“I still haven’t read any more than just the two pages of Don’s book!” Lavin cackles. “Now that mine is finally done, I can go finish his book.”

Lavin grew up in a large family — “I have eight brothers and sisters,” she says — and her early days were spent in upstate New York, where her father moved between a variety of teaching posts (including one at Peekskill Military Academy, which, as a training location for the New York Jets, allowed her the opportunity to meet Joe Namath in 1967).

Rather than being a linear tale, Lavin breaks life into chunks throughout “Cold Pizza,” often stepping out of the narrative to relate interesting tidbits, bon mots and guitar tips.

She’s careful not to make the book into an insider’s game, and when she speaks, for example, of folksinging friend Dave Van Ronk (who also served as her guitar teacher) she makes sure to place him in context that a layman could understand.

Van Ronk drank a little more than Lavin could match, and while “Cold Pizza” is often a portrait of a musician on the road, it is not a catalog of debaucheries. That fact alone — for its uniqueness — would make the book interesting, but Lavin writes with the same precision and wit she brings to her songs.

“It’s much harder to write about life than to live it,” Lavin says. “What do you leave in, what do you take out? Of course, I haven’t been taking notes my whole life, so there’s a lot of stuff I’ve forgotten, too.”

Lavin started out waiting tables at Caffe Lena in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Eventually the owner, Lena Spencer, let her start singing between other acts.

It was Van Ronk who finally spurred her to move to New York City, with his promise of guitar lessons.

Other notables in “Cold Pizza” include Dame Edna, Tin Pan Alley songwriter Ervin Drake and singer Camille West, who replaced Lavin in the Four Bitchin’ Babes lineup in 1997.