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## express night out

BOOKS

### **Life on the Road: Christine Lavin, 'Cold Pizza for Breakfast: a Mem-wha??'**



Folk singers are generally good storytellers, and [Christine Lavin](#) is no exception: in her three-decade-long career, she's released more than 20 albums (solo and with the [Four Bitchin' Babes](#), which she founded), all of which feature her conversational style, both in her lyrics and, sometimes, in spoken-word narrations.

Luckily, that yarn-spinning knack also carries over to her new memoir, "[Cold Pizza for Breakfast: a Mem-wha??](#)," which is a compilation of dozens of charming stories about her life on the road, in the studio and at home.

The great thing about "Cold Pizza" is that it's both linear and not: the chapters are arranged mostly chronologically, but Lavin also groups stories by common themes (a chapter on difficult record label situations, for example), characters or locations. Those

groupings give her stories a stream-of-consciousness feel that further reinforces Lavin's conversational style; a reader will genuinely feel like one story sparks another, rather than being a sidetrack or tangent, and unless you're a real stickler for dates, the fuzzy chronology all seems fairly inconsequential compared to the delightful situations she describes.



Lavin also doesn't sugar-coat her past. She's as likely to talk about her failures as her triumphs, and sometimes those disappointments — tales of feisty audiences, or getting booed, or boy troubles, or having her electricity shut off — are the most charming of all. Not that Lavin ever seems unreachable, but those stories (plus the countless jobs she worked — from camp counselor to canning factory worker to temp job after temp job) make her seem even more human and relatable.

On a personal note: I had my own little run-in with Lavin a few years ago, when I wrote a [review of her album "folkZinger"](#) for The Washington Post. The album didn't come with a lyric sheet, but Lavin enunciates well, so I had no difficulties transcribing a few of the lines from her political song "The Peter Principle at Work" — or so I thought. A few weeks after my review ran, I received a letter in the mail from Lavin, commenting that I had transcribed her lyrics incorrectly (whoops!) but that she liked my version better, so she'd be singing my words in concert from then on.

The whole interchange was totally bizarre on many levels — for one thing, we writers rarely get any direct feedback or communication from our subjects. And while I haven't been to a Lavin concert since my review to know if she truly changed the lyrics to match the ones I wrote, I do know this: if there were ever a doubt that all the many quirky, random encounters in "Cold Pizza" could happen to one person, Lavin's letter to me pretty much verifies it. If she took the time to write to a random music critic about a short CD review, then it's not only possible but likely that she had an equally strong hand in guiding her career forward — which makes the stories in "Cold Pizza" not just entertaining but also quite empowering at the same time.

*Written by Express contributor Catherine Lewis  
Photo by Irene Young*

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