



## Cold Pizza for Breakfast

### Christine Lavin and her “mem-wha?”

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After a show at the Ark, a woman asked Christine Lavin if she had ever been a nun. No, the singer-songwriter replied, but she had gone out drinking with two nuns and a priest when she was a teenager. She’d also baptized some kids at a Jewish camp when she was a counselor. These are among the irreverent stories she shares with readers in her “mem-wha?,” titled after her 2009 album, *Cold Pizza for Breakfast*.

Those who enjoy Lavin’s songs—by turns perceptive, witty, and bittersweet—may appreciate this look into the artist’s life, onstage and off. Some of her stories illuminate songs, some could have been songs, and some give readers a look at life on the road or inside the music business. She includes some solid advice: Avoid assonant end-rhymes. Start your own songwriting workshop. Read a contract before signing it. We get a look at the life and death of Dave Van Ronk, one of her mentors. We see her knit a shawl for Elizabeth Edwards, learn how to throw a spiral from Joe Namath, and appear in a play with Julia Roberts. We follow her obsession with the Broadway stage, especially with *Dame Edna* and with *The Drowsy Chaperone*, a musical she saw sixty-seven times. (Ann Arborites can see it at the Performance Network next season.)

Lavin has a sense of humor about herself and lets us know when she messes up. We hear about what happened when she opened for Joan Rivers—it wasn't pretty—how she confused a car service with an escort service, how she cheated a six-year-old out of a Cracker Jack prize, and why she got stuck in the bathroom of a whorehouse run by a man out on bail for murder.

Unfortunately, her writing here lacks the succinctness and snap of her songs. While her lyrics distill human experience, Lavin meanders through *Pizza*, and readers need to wade through fluff to get the stuff that's insightful or laugh-out-loud funny. She reports incidents that happen to have happened in the course of her life, sometimes to other people, even when the stories don't have actual or metaphorical significance. In a book that names names relentlessly—famous people, unknown singers, people who show up at a party, realtors--we aren't shocked when we learn an acquaintance committed suicide, but we struggle to place the name.

At the end of this story, Lavin has money problems. Can she solve them by entering a bake-off, selling garments she knits, or making a film? No, she will write a book. That's not the best way to raise cash, I can tell you, but if everyone she mentions in *Pizza* buys it, she'll be flush.

Lavin discusses and signs copies of *Pizza* [at Barnes & Noble on June 4](#) and will appear [at the Ark June 5](#). 