



Christine Lavin's 'Mem-Wha?' Is Mem-Wondrous!

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By Andrew Martin

Those of us who think we know legendary folksinger/composer/comedian Christine Lavin really do believe we've heard it all, until...we at long last read her autobiography, *Cold Pizza For Breakfast: A Mem-Wha?* which is now available for sale and published by TellMe. In this impossible-to-put-down tome of her life story, for which a party in NYC will be held at the Barnes & Noble at Lincoln Triangle on

June 7th at 7:30pm (and not only hopes to feature the lady generously reading her gorgeously-crafted chapters, but also the debut of a special verse of "It Was A Very Good Year," written for her by cherished friend and composer Ervin Drake, and for whom an entire chapter was created in the book), Lavin dazzles even further than with such staple compositions as "It's A Good Thing He Can't Read My Mind," "The Kind Of Love You Never Recover From" and "I Want To Be A Mysterious Woman," all performed and recorded by many a stellar cabaret artist to these many seasons, besides Ms. Lavin herself.

After launching a story contained therein like a rocket soaring for the stratosphere, with a hilariously-nightmarish account of opening for Joan Rivers in what she calls West Bomb Beach (West Palm Beach in Florida, for those not in the know), Lavin takes us on an indescribable journey through her brilliantly-written narrative. Her earliest accounts, as one of nine siblings (and a much-beloved dog named Spanky) in the upstate New York town of Peekskill, introduces us at the outset to the wonderful world of her family's up-close-and-personal exposure to such legendary football players as Joe Namath and sportscaster Howard Cosell. We also learn of her earliest musical education, learning guitar via the twice-weekly televised instruction of Laura Weber on PBS, besides an hysterical account of a personal and accidental tangle with the Catholic church and hierarchy thereof, and then changing her college major no less than six times. And that's where the story merely begins.



From there, we are taken to her initial foray into the world of folk music and performance, most notably at the Caffè Lena in Saratoga Springs in the 1970s, and the adventures she endured (including a less-than-stellar meeting with Bob Dylan, where she was afforded the opportunity to teach him an unknown lyric to a song, in turn taught to her by Pete Seeger), as well as a long-term romance gone horribly, horribly wrong with a self-styled pirate (and utter scallywag, in piratical parlance). Along the way, Lavin regales us with tales of her early days in New York City, playing at several spaces there as well as music festivals as far reaching as Canada and Australia, all peppered gorgeously with stories about her struggles to find steady employment, places to live and various (and comically-illustrated) health issues.

However, we learn so much more about Lavin than just run-of-the-mill stories of a struggling artist who ultimately finds personal success, if not immediately-recognizable household namedom; in point of fact, the lady is a raconteuse of the highest degree. The reader is drawn in, and blissfully so, by her love of theatre, her love of needlecrafting, her love of baking (her petit pain au chocolat is legend in certain nightlife circles) and her deep, and never-waning, affection for the city she now calls home. Not to mention how she feels about Dame Edna, or the legendary composer Ervin Drake and his wife Edith, or Jim Caruso and his Cast Party every Monday night at Birdland's, or the women who at various times comprised her all-girl group Four Bitchin' Babes, including Julie Gold, Sally Fingerett, Megon McDonough and folk legend Janis Ian, besides the late lamented Mary Travers. And other cherished friends from her world pop up continuously throughout the book, including Andrew Ratshin, Cheryl Wheeler, David Buskin and Robin Batteau and Harry, with a last name never cited but clearly a major influence upon her existence both professionally and personally. No, there's no romance with him, as the lady herself would be quick to emphasize.

Furthermore, for those exposed to the folk music scene and the cabaret scene (and those truly privileged enough to circulate within both), *Cold Pizza For Breakfast* emerges as a

most wonderful testament to the fact that nightlife in New York, and the community thereof, is a family beyond explanation. Within the book's four-hundred-plus pages (including index and appendices) one finds such names as Janet Fanale, Billy Stritch, Barbara Brussell, Marcy Heisler, Zina Goldrich, John Wallowitch, Tony DeSare, David Budway, Stuart Ross, Ann Ruckert, Joan

Crowe, Frank Basile and Celeste Holm (his lovely wife), not to mention Tony Bennett and Liza Minnelli. And again, Lavin's narrative is so vibrant, and written in such a burst-right-off-the-page style, that it's impossible not to find oneself right there with her as she's telling the world about that particular happenstance.

For those who can't attend the event on June 7th, they couldn't be better served than acquiring a copy of Christine Lavin's *Cold Pizza For Breakfast*. It is not merely an autobiography meant to be read once through and then filed away, but to be re-read, and re-read again, until it's at least partly committed to memory, then shared with a friend, and then re-read again. Only once or twice in a lifetime does such an autobiography stroll its way onto one's bookshelf with such easygoing, yet determined, purpose.

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