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SLICES OF LIFE

Christine Lavin serves up *Cold Pizza for Breakfast*



Babysitting **Rex Ryan**, meeting **Bob Dylan**, opening for **Joan Rivers**: These are just a few of the memories folk singer/songwriter **Christine Lavin**, best known for her work with the **Four Bitchin' Babes**, covers in her new book, *Cold Pizza for Breakfast: A Mem-Wha?? (Tell Me)*.

Lavin recently talked about her approach to writing *Cold Pizza*, her thoughts on the head coach of the New York Jets and her latest music project.

Medleyville.us: Here's an obvious but necessary question: When and why did you decide to write a memoir?

Christine Lavin: "I moved into an apartment that was \$700 a month *more* than I could afford. What was I thinking? *Hey, I'll write a book and maybe it will sell well enough that I'll make an extra \$700 a month!*

"P.S.: I've moved. But I've had a lot of funny little adventures as a musician — some I really do think were guided by fate, others happenstance, that I thought I should write them down. I wish I had taken notes along the way. I've forgotten as much as I've remembered. I guess if I'm to write another book, I'll have to go to a hypnotist to unlock the rest of the stories."

Talk about the writing process.

Lavin: "I would sit at my computer and think back. I only knew how I wanted to start — the story of getting booed offstage when opening for Joan Rivers in West Palm Beach, get that out of the way right away. It's the one story people close to me tell me I should never have told anyone, ever. Obviously, I ignored their advice.

"An advance version of the book went out to some reviewers, and that was very helpful because I found out I had some minor facts wrong — like the story of CBC announcer **Bruce Steele** and the streaker at the Owen Sound Folk Festival in Canada. It happened when he was introducing **Archie Fisher**, but I initially wrote that it happened during Fisher's set. Someone spotted that error and let me know so it could be fixed for the final printing.

"[On] my Web site, I have a page where I'm posting 'corrections' or simply someone else's recollection of a story that I told. I apologize right here and now to anyone whose details are incorrect in the book. If they will let me know, I'll post their version of events at my Web site."

Which parts of the book were difficult to write, and why?

Lavin: "I made a conscious choice to *not* write a gossipy trash-telling kind of

book — but trust me, I could have. I followed *Sing Out!* magazine's philosophy: They only run reviews of albums they think are good; they don't want to waste ink on bad music. I didn't want to bring up old slights or tell a lot of backstage horror stories about other performers — hey, let them write their own book! And I didn't want to intrude on the privacy of people I've been involved with. So I ended up leaving out more than 100 pages that were in the original manuscript."

What type of feedback have you received from those you mention in the book by name and those people whose names you changed?

Lavin: "Everyone I've heard from so far has been really happy to be included. In the preface, I write, 'Google any of the names in the index or the song list at the back of the book and you'll make wonderful musical discoveries.' I did hear from **Tony R.**, my classmate from Lakemont Academy — originally I used his full name, but he asked me not to. He didn't want the attention, so I was able to take his last name out before the final editing. I didn't say anything negative about him — just the opposite — but for whatever reason, he didn't want his last name used. I was so happy to hear from him, though. I had given him a gift many years ago, and he told me he still had it."

Let's delve a little deeper into some of the areas you cover in your book. You were a babysitter for Rex Ryan, now the head coach of the New York Jets. What kind of leadership skills, if any, did he show at a young age?

Lavin: "If only I had known what was in store for him, I would have paid closer attention to his behavior in the sandbox. I was the babysitter for the Flood family, who lived downstairs from us. **Tom Flood** was the coach of the Peekskill Military Academy football team, and he became good friends with the coaches and trainers, so when they needed a babysitter, I would sometimes get the call.

"I feel certain that the Jets are going to win the Super Bowl very soon. The combination of Rex Ryan and **Mark Sanchez** is magic. ... when the Jets win the Super Bowl, I will beam with pride and feel partially responsible. If I had dropped Rex Ryan on his head as a baby, it might not have happened. And it *will* happen.

"It was **Budd Mishkin** of NY1 who figured out I was Rex Ryan's babysitter. I told him about living at the Jets' summer training camp and babysitting for the Jets' staff. He asked me what years that happened, and if I remembered any of the names. I remembered **Buddy Ryan** was one of them, and after I told him, Budd went and Googled 'Rex Ryan' and found out he was born in 1962. It never occurred to me that it was the same person. I remember his dad was very friendly and nice, a really dedicated coach. [It's] so great to see Rex making such a good name for himself in the same profession. I love reading about how proud his dad is of him."

In your early teens, during your first-ever performance, you played an original called "The World Is Coming to an End." That's a pretty heavy title. Was this song inspired by a teenage romance gone bad, or was it about something more serious, such as the Cuban missile crisis or the Cold War?

Lavin: "No, nothing as dramatic as that. I only remember one verse, [which was] inspired by the nervous anxiety the cadets would deal with when they had dances and area girls' private schools would be bused in to dance with the boys. That verse goes: 'You've got a big date for the dance/ba bum ba bum ba bum/now you've got a hole in your pants/ba bum ba bum ba bum/the world is coming to an end!'

"A few years ago, a really wonderful music producer/medical doctor — that's quite the combination — named **David Seitz** organized a two-disc project of people singing my songs. **Andy Breckman** — creator of the TV show *Monk*, who started out as folksinger — sang a bit of that song over the telephone. The whole project was a surprise, and that performance by Breckman was a really funny topper!"

With *Cold Pizza for Breakfast: A Mem-Wha??* in stores, what projects are you working on now?

Lavin: "I am in the final stages of *Just One Angel*, an alternative Christmas/Chanukah/Solstice/New Year's compilation subtitled 'New Holiday

Classics.' [Actor] **Jeff Daniels** is track No. 1. Actor **David Rasche** is on it ... so are **Uncle Bonsai, Janis Ian, Lori Lieberman, The Accidentals** [and] classical guitarist **Hilary Field** — hers is the title track. The album will be on Yellow Tail Records, arriving in October.

"My song on it is quite a departure. It's called 'When You're Single at Christmastime.' I've been single all my life, by choice. I keep crazy hours; I often write from 1 to 5 a.m. I love the life I live. But when holiday time comes around, I have to stop being so selfish and do the family stuff. That's what the song is about."

-- Introduction and interview by **Chris M. Junior**

Christine Lavin on tour (schedule subject to change):

* July 4: Westglow Resort and Spa — Blowing Rock, N.C.

* July 26-30: Swannanoa Gathering — Asheville, N.C.

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