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FolkWorld - Home of European Music



In 1975 Christine Lavin was waitressing at the Caffé Lena in Saratoga Springs, New York:

[Lena Spencer] had gotten word that Bob Dylan was putting together a special 'bicentennial tour'. Rumor had it they were not going to play large venues, just small ones. Lena, bless her heart, wanted them to play the Caffé. Lena, with all her grit and determination, got the number for a Massachusetts motel that might be the place where the musicians were. She asked if we'd be willing to go on a road trip with her, and we said yes.

For the next three days we got to be part of the Dylan entourage and were able to watch a few of the performances. The tour was loosely organized - there were three big buses, a dozen or so cars, and a couple of trucks. We were just told to follow the buses. After stopping at one rest stop, the buses got back on the highway going in the wrong direction, with all of us following. When they realized what they'd done, the buses all made a huge, wide U-turn in the grass to cross over the highway and go the other way.

On Thursday afternoon, Bob Dylan and some of his friends made a side trip to visit the grave of Jack Kerouac, author of 'On the Road'. We all pulled into a rest stop along the interstate and went into the restaurant. I tried to think of something to say, so I blurted out, *I love how you end the show with 'This Land Is Your Land' - it's a nice touch how everybody takes a different verse. Thanks*, he said, fidgeting. I asked him if he had heard the Native American verse that Pete Seeger had been singing. *No*, Bob responded. *How does it go?*

This land was your land, it was not my land
Until you sold us Manhattan Island
We pushed your Nations to the reservations
This land was swiped from you by me

Wow, I like it, he said. Then he got up from the table. So that was my one and only conversation with Bob Dylan. I was hoping he would say something wise that I would remember forever, but instead I told him how a song went.



Christine Lavin, *Cold Pizza for Breakfast - A Mem-wah???*. Tell Me Press, 2010, ISBN 978-0-9816453-6-0, pp345, US\$21.95.

Christine worked at the coffehouse until Dave Van Ronk (#32) convinced her to move to New York City and pursue a career as a singer-songwriter. She followed his advice and accepted his offer of guitar lessons.

Let's make a quick jump back in time: as a kid Christine was taught piano, when being 12 years of age she watched guitar lessons on TV, with 13 she started writing her own songs. It was in the magic year of 1975, when she became a touring musician in - of all places - Clear Lake, Iowa, where Buddy Holly's plane crashed and killed him. Christine was singing at elementary schools:

[My agent] had assured all the schools that if they didn't like me, they would get their money back. I did fifty shows in five weeks, and only one school asked for a refund. That school was in Ohio, where the principal who introduced the show warned the students that they weren't allowed to applaud because the sound is very disruptive to performers. He also told them they weren't allowed to laugh. It was like performing in a children's prison, under the watchful eye of the mean old warden. The principal subsequently rated my performance unsatisfactory; no one enjoyed it, he said.

In 1981 she recorded her debut album, more were to follow, including a cookbook project for Appleseeds Recordings in 2006 (#32).

Christine Lavin's memoir **Cold Pizza for Breakfast** kicks off with elderly Florida residents booing her off the stage. Well, is it a good idea to sing "Bald Headed Men" to men wearing shiny black toupees?

I became aware that the bright stage lights were bouncing off my shiny guitar and then hitting the audience in the eyes. Some were shading their eyes with their hands, some with their programs. I tried to move in such a way that I wasn't constantly hitting the same people in the eyes over and over again. When that song was done, to barely any applause I said: *I know I'm moving sort of spaz-like onstage. It's because I can see the stage lights are hitting my guitar, then hitting some of you in the eye. I'm moving like this because I am trying to blind you all equally.*



Christine Lavin @ FolkWorld: [FW#32](#), [#34](#), [#41](#)

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These stories are in line with the kind of songs Christine is writing, often if not mainly humorous and amusing. I will give you some examples here, e.g. the one about Prince Charles and Lady Di (as is so often it is not that funny for those concerned):

Oh Charles, my Charles
Any girls looks good when she's nineteen

But think about her thirty years from now
When she's an old and ugly queen
Ooh - take a look at your mother, boy
And you'll know what I mean

The next one had been written before Michael Jackson left Planet Neverland for good and all, but it is an well-known story for artists:

Record companies love it
When their recording artists die
They get to re-release all the albums
That never sold back in July
Well I don't have any records
But I know the soundman's making a tape
And in three months he'll be bootlegging copies
For \$7.98

This lady is a real character and a born storyteller. Christine has experienced more than others in her life, or has a better memory. At times it is hilarious, even if it comes to the ups and downs of a performing artist. A chapter is dedicated to *stupidly crappy mind-numbing music business disappointments*, but even then it's witty and funny. Besides this book is a kind of DIY kit for upcoming songwriters who want to perform. Then this book is a real treat, you don't even have to know (save like) her music.

Christine met her share of interesting people, including Utah Phillips ([#39](#)), Tom Paxton ([#35](#)), Rosalie Sorrels ([#31](#)), Nanci Griffith ([#39](#)), Michelle Shocked ([#24](#)), James Keelaghan ([#40](#)), David Francey ([#30](#)), Rod Picott ([#31](#)), Archie Fisher ([#40](#)), and many more I'd never heard of. It is a nice touch when she says regarding the book's index: *I encourage you to google every single name listed there. You might make some life-changing musical discoveries...*