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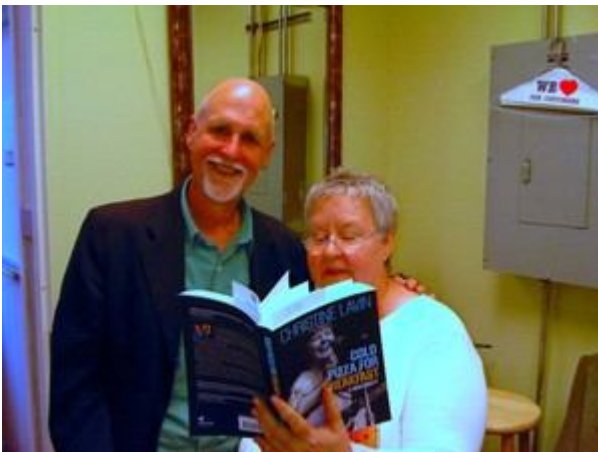
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written by Jim Bessman

Now an author, folk music queen Christine Lavin discusses her new 'mem-wha'

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John Platt and Christine Lavin

Photo by: Jim Bessman

Award-winning actor and acclaimed singer-songwriter Jeff Daniels really nails it in his foreword to "Queen of Contemporary Folk Music" [Christine Lavin](#)'s new memoir *Cold Pizza for Breakfast: A Mem-wha??* (Tell Me Press): "Whether she's recording an album solely of her favorite recipes (with an accompanying cookbook), hosting knitting circles before her shows, or in this case, writing a 'mem-wha??,' she is what every artist yearns to be: an original."

So is her mem-wha. Fun and entertaining as she is on stage, *Cold Pizza For Breakfast* (the title derives from one of her most-loved songs that also inspired the ESPN show *Cold Pizza*), recounts a 25-year recording/performing career that has

not only brought her great renown in the folk music/singer-songwriter communities (not to mention cooking, knitting and even baton-twirling circles), but has been an exposure vehicle for hundreds and probably thousands of fellow singer-songwriters whom she has promoted in her concerts, albums (including compilation albums and side projects like her Four Bitchin' Babes "gal pal" singer-songwriter quartet) and frequent radio DJ activities.

Full of great dues-paying stories like working as a string bean inspector in a canning factory (she was charged with removing mice guts, twigs and dead grasshoppers) and winning a female impersonator talent contest (she claimed not to know if she was really female), the book essentially documents the folk music scene in New York from the mid-1980s to now. Lavin discussed it after an in-store performance interview with WFUV's *Sunday Breakfast* host John Platt at the Lincoln Center Barnes & Noble on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Why did you write *Cold Pizza*?

A few years ago I did a series of concerts with Don White, a remarkable singer/songwriter from Lynn, Massachusetts. He had just written a memoir, and after reading only two pages, I put it down, knowing I had to write my own.

I apologized to Don, telling him I couldn't continue reading his until mine was completed because I didn't want to be influenced in any way by his writing. I still haven't finished reading it because I'm completing work on the audio version of *Cold Pizza*, but that's how good his writing is: After only two pages his book inspired me to take pen in hand.

How does writing your memoirs compare to writing songs?

How's this for a comparison? Writing a song is like playing a series of downs in football: Lots of rules, timing is crucial, lots of boundaries, lots of protective gear, lots of stopping and starting.

Writing a book is like playing a game of soccer: A lot more freedom, a lot more ground you can cover, hardly any protective gear--so you can run free, but you're always in danger of getting really creamed out there. The objective is the same--scoring. And there's a ball involved in both, but they are completely different games.

I know that is probably one of the worst analogies ever written! But I did it for a reason: So I could mention that in the book I reveal that I was New York Jets' Coach Rex Ryan's babysitter when he was a toddler! It's in the chapter entitled "Piglet Meets Joe Namath." You'll have to read it to find out more!

Are you happy with the response so far?

Yes, it's been really gratifying to read the reviews, though, since I'm a performer I have learned something very important about reviews over the years: You're never as bad as your worst review and you're never as good as your best. You just have to take it all in stride and keep your focus on your work.

Like Don White, you're always promoting other artists. Was it difficult focusing on yourself?

Many years ago singer/songwriter Jack Hardy said something I never forgot: The songwriter is not important, the song is. Try this experiment: Close your eyes and think of two or three of your all-time favorite songs. I bet they're songs that resonate deeply within *you*, that touch *you* in some profound way. Maybe they stir memories of a lost love, or an idyllic summer as a kid--but the songs you love most are the ones that speak to you about your life. Who *wrote* them is not why you love them, just as who I am is not so important--but I have a great opportunity with this book to connect readers with songs they might not yet know about.

There are so many songwriters whose work I love, and I wanted to at least mention them in my book because in the preface I say 'Google any of the names in the index or the song list at the back of the book of my top 1,000 songs I've played on the radio as guest DJ, and you'll make wonderful musical discoveries.' It's always been easier to promote other songwriters than promote myself, but hopefully this book will win us all some new fans.

You're working on an audio book? Will it contain music?

Yes. In the places where I have excerpts of lyrics, I picked up my guitar during the recording of the audio book and I sang those lyrics rather than read them. Jeff Daniels also came into the studio and read the foreword that he wrote for the book.

Jeff Daniels is a big fan of yours, but he's a big-time actor.

I offered to pay him, but he refused. Instead I sent him a big bad engraved Swiss Army knife--like the one we gave to [Mary Travers](#) when she graciously agreed to appear on a Four Bitchin' Babes CD and also refused payment. I've learned that when someone does something very kind and refuses payment, giving them an engraved Swiss Army knife is never refused!

Are there any other guest stars?

For the last chapter, which opens with lyrics from my song “Getting’ Used To Leavin’,” I use the studio recording of that song, since it also had Robin Batteau, John Gorka, and Eric Andersen’s voices on it. So I thought that now that the audio book had my voice, Jeff Daniels’ voice and those three guys, why not add a few more voices to the mix?

So I called Ervin Drake and Julie Gold--both stellar songwriters that I write about--and asked them to come in and record the introduction and the outro of the book, plus “re-create” two scenes they starred in in the book. I was also working with the a cappella group The Accidentals on a holiday project, and asked if they could record short “bumpers” that we could play throughout the book--and they did. So their voices are on the audio recordings, too. I came in there thinking I’d read the whole thing myself, but ultimately we ended up with a lot more than that.

So when will the audio book come out?

They're now saying September--hopefully in time for a bunch of library/bookstore readings I'm doing in Massachusetts and California. It's in the can and mastered, and this past week I recorded a promo for it that plays when you visit the homepage of my www.christinelavin.com.

What other projects are you working on?

That holiday recording, which is entitled *Just One Angel*. It's 22 songs by 22 singer/songwriters--Christmas, Chanukah, Solstice, New Year's songs. A very inclusive holiday record that's coming out in October on Seattle's Yellow Tail Records. I started working on it in February, but most of the intense post-production work has been going on during the blistering heat wave where It's been 100 degrees.

But I take that as a very good sign: When you're working on a holiday recording during the hottest days of the year, you can bet it's going to be a really nice Christmas!

(The Examiner is cited on Page 362 of *Cold Pizza For Breakfast: A Mem-wha??*)

VIDEO LINK:

Christine Lavin and Don White sing Lavin's classic "Good Thing He Can't Read My Mind."