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Christine Lavin at Natick Center for the Arts

Combining Standards and New Material

By: David Wilson - 2010-09-20

Christine Lavin is one of the few performers, since the folk heydays of the '60s and '70s to create an immediate and indelible impression on me. I have a very precise memory of having first heard her on my car radio in the mid '90s as I exited 128 at Totten Hill Road in Waltham and pulled off to the side to wait for the announcer to tell me to whom I was listening. I rummaged for pen and paper and wrote a note to myself.

Since then I had picked up several of her cds and enjoyed her ramblings on the misadventures of herself, gender and species but until this weekend I had never experienced Lavin perform.

Enthusiastic applause greeted her at The Natick Center for the Arts as she walked on stage. From start to finish, the audience was in synch with Christine's numbers, mostly chestnuts with a few new topical offerings. From her opening with "Prince Charles" to her closing with "What Was I Thinking", we were all her best friends and her confidantes.

While Christine does not have a compelling voice, it is equal to the task. She combines innovative phrasing and use of technology, (digital loops I presume,) to occasionally harmonize with herself, keeping her presentation musically interesting.

But her major strength continues to be her unique perspective projected via lyrics which continually surprise and delight us, even when we have heard them many times before. This is in good part because Christine is constantly rewriting, updating, adding alternative story-lines, and accenting different aspects of the experience she reports to us. The tapestry of each piece is thus forever fresh.

Perhaps it is the memory of Dave Van Ronk who urged her to leave the safety of Saratoga Springs and bring her talent to Greenwich Village that moves her to remain the patron of new and oft under-appreciated talent. Christine used her platform to present three local musicians each of whom performed brief solos and thereafter joined in with her. The budding prodigy singer/songwriter, 14 yr old [Hayley Reardon](#) from Marblehead was later followed by her mentor, [Don White](#). We then were treated to a rare appearance by, (long missing from the scene), the elegant and prismatic toned, [Barbara Kessler](#), now a Hopkinton housewife and studio recording producer. Together they provided what I am inclined to call, moments of "sober relief."

As I sat listening to Christine, it occurred to me that the only other performer I had ever heard with whom I could closely compare her was Tom Lehrer. Both of them have created a repertoire of sophisticated and humorous songs with perspectives that stand apart from the ordinary and will forever be identified with their composers and their composers alone. Though quite different in many ways they illustrate the validity of Robert Anton Wilson's observation, "Ye shall know the truth for it shall make you giggle." Belly laugh might be even more appropriate...

Lavin shared memories of folk-scene history and interspersed her performance with brief readings from her recently published autobiography, "Cold Pizza For Breakfast". Christine confessed unabashedly to one foible after another, dazzled us with an incomparable display of baton twirling and left us at the end of the evening with the certain knowledge that she was indeed one of our closest friends and with the desire to spend many more evenings in her company.



Denying rumor she was an ex-nun



Local singer songwriter, Don White



Singer/Songwriter & studio producer, Barbara Kessler



L-R Hayley Reardon, Christine Lavin, Barbara Kessler. In the rear are audience members conscripted as chorus.



White, Reardon, Lavin, Kessler singing Goodnight to Irene...

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