



Book Report

COLD PIZZA FOR BREAKFAST A Mem-wha??

by Christine Lavin

You've probably picked up an autobiography of some fascinating person, only to find that being the first astronaut to play scrabble with a Martian cactus didn't turn that person into a gifted author. On the other hand, you've probably picked up an autobiography of someone with a beige life and found the book impossible to put down because of the writing. Christine Lavin not only has a life like a pageant but also the writing skill to pull it across your mind's folding riser like a psychedelic tableau.

Christine's excellent new autobiography, **COLD PIZZA FOR BREAKFAST**, is available right now for about \$15 or \$10 in digital format, and soon to be available as an audio book read by Christine herself. If you have seen her on stage, you already know her style, which is clear, hilarious, personal, warm, edgy, and exciting all at the same time, and oh, by the way, also musical and poetic. This is what her prose writing is like, with a cadence that bounces along like a merry conversation.

This kind of breezy writing isn't as easy as it seems (believe me). But it's obvious from her songs that Christine has been working successfully with this natural delivery for years. A conversational lilt is hard to achieve in a song lyric, with its set rhyme and meter. In prose, for me anyway, it's even harder, oddly. But in any case, Christine overcomes whatever her personal stylistic barriers may be to end up with a book that NEVER feels forced or contrived.

So the book is a delight to read, but as anyone who has seen *This Is Spinal Tap* knows, a career in the music biz isn't all rosy. **Cold Pizza** is overall upbeat, however Christine does not shy away from the mortifications, illnesses, mistakes, the fears, the bloopers, the tragedies of making a living as a performing songwriter. These memories must have been grim to trudge through, but they make the book humble, believable, and captivating.

Making it even more readable, Christine breaks up the prose with plenty of conversations, sixteen pages of photographs, and also scads of song lyrics -- hers and others -- throughout the book. Then to finish it off, there is an extensive index in the back of the book of 1,000 songs she has played on her radio show. Yes, Christine has a radio show!

LONG DISCLAIMER

Christine has a radio show because, as she says in a typical understatement, she likes to "help people." She quotes her late dear friend and mentor:

"One of Dave Van Ronk's mantras was, 'When music of quality sells, it's good for all of us. Never root against your competitor if what they are doing is good work, because ultimately you will benefit from it.'"

Christine takes this mantra to heart and pumps it to a higher level altogether. She goes far out of her way to boost the careers of musicians who would be considered by casual observers as her "competitors." I know this not only from the stories in this book and from talking with countless musicians over the years, but also from personal experience.

We -- my music partner Lou and I -- have shared the stage with Christine quite a few times in quite a few places, as funny songwriters are often presented together. But a number of these gigs have been created out of whole cloth by Christine herself. For instance, back in 1996 Christine put together a two night festival of funny songs at New York's famous **Bottom Line**, and, working with Shanachie Entertainment Corp, released two volumes called *Christine Lavin Presents: LAUGH TRACKS; Two Evenings of Music and Madness, Live at the Bottom Line*. We were part of that marvelous scene, and are represented on the recording, thanks 99% to Christine. (I remember, among other excitements, we met and yakked with the goofy genius Andy Breckman backstage for quite a while; he went on to create the television show **MONK**.)

One more example: Every now and then we do play a gig on our own somewhere in Manhattan. I think it was in 2004 that we had our first gig in the groovy little basement venue of a place called the **Cornelia Street Cafe**. Sometime prior to the date, Lou called Christine to ask if she'd like to come to the

show. Christine said she would but she had another show at an earlier time she wanted to see. It was one of her favorite groups, the stellar Weavers-reproduction group, *Work o' the Weavers*. She snapped into action and arranged it that our show would be announced at their show, and a special 2-ticket price would apply for those who would like to see both shows! Imagine! Needless to say we had a good crowd and a swell time.

These are only a couple of examples of Christine's countless efforts that have DIRECTLY benefitted our career. But I'm not writing about her book as any sort of return favor. I'm writing about it because I think it's a wonderful book, and have added these personal experiences only as examples of the deep well of autobiographical generosity she has been able to draw from.

END OF LONG DISCLAIMER

Christine offers many suggestions to songwriters and others in the music business that she has been taught by mentors and showbiz friends, or learned from experience. So many of these suggestions are wide-ranging, they apply to the lives of plumbers and hairdressers too. But it is a book about the arts.

And by "the arts," I include knitting, baton twirling, and various other fringe artistic pursuits which she weaves into the fabric of her performances. Much of the last part of the book turns to the theater, of which she is a diehard fan. She has seen the Broadway musical *The Drowsy Chaperone* 67 TIMES! She is crazy about Dame Edna (see Google). Christine is as much an art input fanatic as an art output fanatic, devouring as much music and theater as she can afford. With the same two-way spirit, in her own career she also accepts help and advice from others as graciously as she offers it. **Cold Pizza For Breakfast** is an education in the dynamics of living such a life and basing it in the teeth of one of the world's most hopped up cities.

Here I am at the end of this infomercial and I haven't even started in on her creation of the *Four Bitchin' Babes*, or her one-night stint as an actress, or her love affair with a pirate... You have to read this book, folks! --WZ, July 2010

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Tell Me Press, New Haven CT, list \$21.95