



Christine Lavin “**FolkZinger**” Appleseed Recordings

Once upon a time, Lavin only wrote and performed *straight* songs that were laced with humour and pathos – astute insights on the human condition. These days her songs are a mix of the former and what are tantamount to theatrical performance pieces [now that she *drives* a digital sampler in addition to her guitar]. Those performance pieces feature spoken interludes alongside melody and lyric, and there are quite a few of the latter on “**FolkZinger**.”

The Lavin/Drake co-write “The Peter Principle At Work” finds rich old George Walker Whatshisname pilloried yet again! – the principle being the one where *successful members* of a structurally tiered organisation are eventually promoted to their highest level of *competence*. And, I guess, vice versa. In fact the latter is one of three contributions on “**FolkZinger**” from hit songwriter Ervin Drake [real name Ervin Maurice Druckman, now a tender 86 year old]. Drake’s short, amusing poem “Armageddon” opens the disc, while toward the close of this disc his *social commentary* [post January 20th 2001] and *call to arms* “[I’m A] Card Carrying Bleeding Heart Liberal” was performed by Lavin and eight friends [+]¹ during her March 13th 2005 performance at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago.

Donovan’s “Happiness Runs” [aka “Pebble And The Man” from the Scot’s 1968 “**In Concert**” album and reworked the following year on “**Barabajagal**”] includes a spoken interlude wherein, circa the mid 1980’s – “*you know, last century,*” Lavin recalls a conversation with Leitch on a flight from Boston to New York. The thrust of that long past conversation and her spoken recollection being, Lavin was scheduled, later that mid ‘80’s day, to open two shows for Donovan at the now defunct 4th Street New York club, The Bottom Line. “The Bends” opens [and closes] with clear indications that the end of the year is approaching, and Lavin goes on to inform us that her first character, a male, hates his job and is currently reading books about scuba divers “*suffering from the bends.*” Elsewhere a woman dreams about a child she recently aborted, while in terms of a place to seek solace there’s comment on “*not trusting the clergy anymore.*” The lines that are totally on the money here are “*The longer that you live, The less you want to hide, But you keep on gazing straight ahead, Keep most of it inside.*” The song’s focus is the persona we present to the world, the one that we’re judged by, even though it may not represent our true self. It’s hardly a surprise that “Winter In Manhattan” is a “*wrap yourself up warm*” ode dedicated to the end of year, and lists many of the activities that you can indulge in.

The Andaman Sea lies within the Indian Ocean, and specifically is the body of water south of Myanmar and west of Thailand. The Salone Islands is the home of a people known as the Moken, aka the Sea Gypsies. I guess Christine’s subscription to National Geographic Magazine does pay a dividend, and resulted in her penning “Moken Spoken Here” the *not so everyday tale* of an environmentally aware South Sea island people who enjoy a simple lifestyle. Nine minutes long “Chicken Soup” is a tongue-in-cheek, mostly spoken, testament to what can go wrong when a friendly – OK, busy body – neighbour presents you with a subscription to the web-site “Chicken Soup For The Soul” [<http://www.chickensoupforthesoul.com/>]. The result is Lavin’s, as expected, *stranger than fiction* tale of interconnected craziness. Subjectively inspired by motivational speakers Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen and their best-selling series of books, the song is also a comment on our online lifestyle.

In a world where you can catch all sorts of nasty infections when mixing with people you don’t know well, Lavin’s “Bad Girl Dreams” advocates practising a safer, though no less stimulating, form of sex while dropping zees on your pillow. “All My Lovin” from the pen of Lennon & McCartney is given a straight from the hip vocal delivery, to the accompaniment of Christine’s guitar and Wayne Batchelor’s upright bass. “One Of The Boys” is a fond recollection of Lavin’s quirky workaholic lawyer/judge grandfather, Thomas, who one day, during the nineteen sixties, and totally out of character, joined Lavin’s brothers for a game of baseball. When batting Thomas hit a “window smashing” home run.

Nine seconds in length, "Surprise" is merely the introduction to the final track on the CD, "Winter In Manhattan," performed on this occasion by the four guy/four gal award winning, *a cappella* vocal group, The Accidentals [<http://www.singers.com/contemp/accidentals.html>].

Note.

[+] – Those friends took part in a writer's seminar that Lavin helmed earlier that day at Old Town.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05.