

SPECIAL EVENTS

Christine Lavin offers fans folk music with a twist

Christine Lavin solo at 7th House (7 N. Saginaw, Pontiac) 9 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 24. Tickets \$20. Reserved, \$15. General admission, \$10. Call (810) 355-8100.

BY MAIKE E. GALLO
SPECIAL WRITER

Christine Lavin's star has been on the rise. Among other things, she's recently severed a decade long affiliation with Rounder Records subsidiary Philo, for whom she quite possibly was the biggest selling artist, and moved to Shanachie, a label well known for a wealth of Irish and folk music.

It appears to have been a wise move. From March 16 to June 30, the first reporting period on Lavin's new album, "Please Don't Make Me Too Happy," it has sold 22,437 copies. That's pretty amazing for a "folk" artist.

Lavin's speaking voice, as much as her singing voice, is inherently gleeful. There is a content and natural implied smile, and she is generous with a laugh. Humor plays a major role in her musical persona.

Quoted on the subject of the importance of humor in her material, Lavin says, "Well, it just finds its way there. Funny situations just kind of unfold in front of me and I'm lucky enough to be witness to it and put it down in music. I really have a good time

on stage. My show is probably 60 percent funny and 40 percent serious. Maybe 75-25 because I guess I talk a lot between songs and that's pretty funny, but some of the new stuff is pretty serious and heartfelt."

A new song she seems particularly excited about, "Shining My Flashlight On The Moon," is a case in point.

"I found myself up in Vermont after the show was over, and it was the very, very last show at a ski resort — a summer resort thing. And at the end of the night the sound company came and took away all the equipment that had been there all summer. All the other performers had left to go back to Massachusetts and I was the only one staying at the lodge. I drove my car to the lodge and I went to the parking lot to get my flashlight and it was really dark and I was just flashing it at different things. It was pretty much — maybe not a full moon, but pretty full, and — this is truly weird — I remember shining my flashlight on the moon, and the light from the flashlight suddenly disappeared when I put it on the moon. Like it was sucked up. It was very strange. It was a funny feeling. I thought, as a songwriter, the stuff we write about is all teenpony and ephemeral and not real important. It's like shining a flashlight on the moon," she laughs.

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"I love being on the road," she says. "I'm writing more and more on the road. I have less distractions and more stimulation. For me, to be living in New York City if you're in a place in New York at night that's so dark you need a flashlight, you're in danger. So I don't have that experience in New York. I don't go into the park at night. I go on the streets with the traffic lights. When I was up in Vermont I felt very, very safe. It was a weird feeling because it's a feeling I hadn't felt in a really long time, to be in real darkness and to know that you're not in

danger of being mugged or jumped or tripping or falling down. So I could never have written 'Shining My Flashlight On The Moon' in New York City."

The latest project for the project-oriented Lavin involves the publication of a book. The book that Christine Lavin envisions involves the setting of her lyrics to cartoons.

Lavin has written beautiful and poignant songs ("The Dakota" about John Lennon's murder, and "Gettin' Used To Lavin" are two favorites), and she's a very impressive guitarist. Her quick wit and healthy sense of humor have a way of overshadowing that sometimes, but it's a safe bet that

those who come for one always leave with an appreciation of the other. She has been called the "Diva of Folk," and while one imagines she would shy away from the "Diva" label, the folk music handle is one she wears well.

"One of the really good things about folk music," she says, "is that there's a lot of people who have been working for a long time without the spotlight on them. Folk music has just never made a lot of money, and the record companies haven't tried to go in and ruin it the way they're trying to ruin country music, even though they don't think they're trying to ruin country music. The country music videos are slicker and

slicker, and the women are prettier and prettier, and the boys are prettier and prettier," she laughs. "My heart aches for the real thing."

Fans of topical folk music with a twist will certainly be treated to the real thing, according to Christine Lavin, come Sunday night. Call early for tickets. This will be a sell out.

If you have a comment or information for Mark Gallo, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1898, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write to him care of Arts & Entertainment Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Venture 'Into the Woods' with Stagecrafters

Stagecrafters presents "Into the Woods" through Oct. 1, at the Baldwin Theatre, 415 S. Lafayette, Royal Oak. Call (810) 641-6430 for tickets.

BY BENITA GREEN
SPECIAL WRITER

As befitting a 40th anniversary, the Stagecrafters open their 1995-1996 season with the mammoth musical by composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim and book writer James Lapine, "Into the Woods," at the beautiful Baldwin Theatre in downtown Royal Oak.

As the story opens, the set reveals three different window scenes cut into a large book painted with the words, "Once Upon A Time." Soon recognizable are the fairy-tale characters Cinderella, played by Jennifer Clark, Jack of Jack and the Beanstalk, played by Jason Landis, and Jack's mother (Judy Clubb). The third

window scene contains the Baker (Doug Clark) and the Baker's Wife (Jodie Wagner). Kuhn of Troy, whose story is an original amalgamation of many fairy tales and is the force which drives the other characters from the other pages into contact with one another. The characters start out with simple wishes that compel them to leave their safe cottages and go into the woods, a place of danger and uncertainty, where a Wolf (portrayed by Jeffrey Willets) tempts Little Red Riding Hood (Debra Dworkin) to stop and "smell the flowers," and the area's resident Witch (Lynette Kerr) terrorizes all with near-impossible demands and a magic stick with the powerful effect of an electric cattle prod.

A strong camaraderie among

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the players in this Stagecrafters production, as well as several excellent voices, makes for an enjoyable show. Lynette Kerr brings a wide acting and vocal range to the role of the Witch, from her nails-on-chalkboard, evil screechiness to warm tones of overprotective motherly love, as in the song "Stay With Me" where, in the universally understood language of empty-nest syndrome, she pleads with her adopted daughter Rapunzel (Allison Schubert of Beverly Hills) not to elope with her Prince, but to "stay a child while you can be a child."

As Little Red Ridinghood, Debra Dworkin is hilariously cheeky and childish, and also has a

strong, beautiful voice. Jason Landis gives an energetic performance as Jack, never missing the comedic timing of his lines, which are usually related to an aged pot cow named Milky-White. Todd Knight as Rapunzel's Prince, and Andy Clements, as Cinderella's Prince sing well together whenever they happen to meet in the forest, as they each pursue the most popular stage-book damsel around (more than just Cinderella and Rapunzel).

Despite a lengthy three-hour production, the Stagecrafters maintain a high level of excitement in their performance. Under the excellent direction of Deborah Landis-Sigler, the transitions from scene to scene are smooth.

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