

Lavin, Lydon shine on new folk releases

SOMETIMES MOTHER REALLY DOES KNOW BEST, by Christine Lavin (Appleseed Recordings; www.christinelavin.com)

Christine Lavin is a keenly observant singer-songwriter, but what makes her most appealing is the comical way she interacts with the audience and her self-deprecating humor. It's what makes her latest CD a joy.

Called "Sometimes Mother Really Does Know Best", Lavin's 17th CD is a 73-minute live benefit recorded in Colorado.

The baton-twirling guitarist (yes, she still does this at shows) is at her lyrical best, aiming at Martha Stewart in a remake of her self-questioning anthem "What Was I Thinking?"

Interacting with the crowd, she dubs a Mr. Colorado Springs, plays with Red Sox fans, holds a science contest and sings of her disdain for the evil "Wind Chimes."

If you pay attention to the nuance of Lavin's stories and songs (you should), what you'll hear is a biting, smart lyricist likely to have you rolling with laughter.

Lavin will open for The Smothers Brothers tonight at Mechanics Hall, 321 Main St., Worcester; 508-752-0700; www.wicn.org. Tomorrow night she will be at the Center for the Arts in Natick, 14 Summer St., 508-647-0097.

LOST AND FOUND, by Jud Caswell, *Lost & Found* (Alderdown Music)

Clever, well-groomed lyrics, percussive guitar playing and a powerful, yet tender, voice, propel this fourth release from Jud Caswell, a Brunswick, Maine, singer-songwriter.

On "Lost & Found," Caswell's songs are a blend of folk, jazz, Celtic and rock, from the politically savvy in the driving "451," inspired by Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451," to the touching and haunting "Leather Shoes," inspired by the Holocaust Museum.

Sweet finger-style acoustic guitar leads "Up Through the Snow," a tribute to a woman fighting cancer.

Caswell's vocals remind me of Ellis Paul's in intensely personal songs that offer slices of life and lovely imagery of dealing with summer heat, the welcoming of a baby into the world or the simple reminiscences of listening to baseball on a "Transistor Radio."

Joining Caswell, winner of the Mansfield-based Rose Garden Coffeehouse's Performing Songwriter Competition, are a half-dozen other musicians. But Caswell's voice and guitars (sometimes sounding like Leo Kottke when playing 12-string) stand out.

Caswell will split a bill with Scott Alarik at 8 p.m. tomorrow at the Rose Garden Coffeehouse in Mansfield, Orthodox Congregational Church, 17 West St., rosegardenfolk.com, 508-699-8122; \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door.

STILL SHE MOVES by Ariane



Ariane Lydon's new CD, "Still She Moves," is definitely worth a listen.

Lydon (Overt Records)

Lyrical imagery, mystical music and ethereal vocals make listening to Wisconsin-based Ariane Lydon's third CD, "Still She Moves," enchanting.

She's a multi-instrumentalist (guitar, keyboards, harp), but it's Lydon's sultry vocals that draw in the listener. Lydon's styles vary from the cosmic to Celtic. Her songs are melody-driven, not piggybacked on chord changes; as a result, her compositions are crafted and elegant.

Lydon's lyrics are empowering, from the opener "Loved in Your Arms," which calls on people to make decisions in their lives, to "Autumn Dance," which encourages getting out to experience life: "The autumn lights aren't for sale/ You have to see them for yourself."

Topics vary from relationships to viewing the "Northern Lights" for the first time to a wailing, moving tribute called "Speechless at Ground Zero." Lydon's is a voice that must be heard.

TRAVELIN' SHOW by Bailey Jester (Johnny Cut Records)

A tight blend of brother duo harmony vocals, jangly acoustic guitars, driving basslines, timely mandolin picking and spicy harmonica give Tennessee-based Bailey Jester a unique, powerful sound.

Brothers Matt Jordan and Young Hines' second CD builds on the success of 2002's "Above the Misery

Line," with cleverly crafted, original, country-folk songs and haunting ballads about love, relationships and just ordinary people.

They delve comically into split personalities in "She's Two of a Kind" and meld voices beautifully in the quick-tempo making-love-work-song "Hard Row to Hoe."

LIVE AT THE RAGGED EDGE by Tom Adams & Michael Cleveland, (Rounder)

One word adequately describes the musical pairing of banjoist Tom Adams and fiddler Michael Cleveland: Sweet.

On "Live at the Ragged Edge," fans of bluegrass banjo and fiddle can't go wrong with this virtuoso duet performance of 23 mostly traditional instrumentals recorded at the Ragged Edge Coffeehouse in Gettysburg, Pa.

Adams (who also plays guitar) is



Christine Lavin performs tonight in Worcester and tomorrow night in Natick.

known for his years with the Johnson Mountain Boys, the Lynn Morris Band and others. Cleveland (who also plays mandolin) has played with several groups, including Rhonda Vincent and the Rage, and he twice has been named fiddler of the year by the International Bluegrass Music Association.

Adams and Cleveland jam with speed, passion and a melding of musical minds that is sweet to the ears. They play blistering remakes of classics "Back Up and Push" and "John Henry," along with Adams originals "Ginny Whitt's" and the bouncing "Funky Mountain Special."

SIDE BY SIDE, by Blue Ridge, *Side By Side* (Sugar Hill)

From driving traditional melodies to revved-up takes on older songs and a heaping of four-part harmony gospel, Blue Ridge offers a fine contemporary bluegrass voice.

Led by extraordinary mandolinist Alan Bibey (IIIrd Tyme Out), the group's sole remaining member since its formation in 1998, the quintet is instrumentally and vocally strong as ever on its 13-track third release.

They perform a tight, harmony-rich rendition of the Jesse Winchester classic "Brand New Tennessee Waltz" and an action-packed, fast-picked instrumental in "Avalanche."

Bibey's title track reminded me of Hot Rize's power and style, with solo voice moving into driving harmonies. Recommended.

— **STEPHEN A. IDE**
The Patriot Ledger