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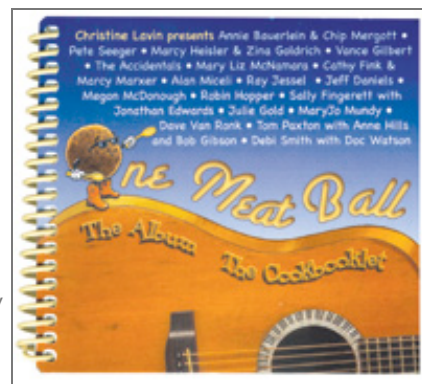
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>> MUSIC

Girlfriend in a Food Coma

Music and cooking find a happy marriage in a new locally produced CD.

by [Jeffrey Barg](#)



You have to start from the God-given premise that folk music, by definition, is delicious. From there you're just a little planning, a few folk-phobic friends and one bigass grocery shop away from your own *One Meat Ball* party, proving crunchy granola folksingers can be spicy, sweet and savory as well.

One Meat Ball is the brainchild of singer/songwriter Christine Lavin, who got a bunch of friends to sing about food and donate recipes for this combination CD/"cookbooklet," just released on West Chester-based Applesseed Recordings.

The whole presentation is fairly adorable, with cover art featuring a dapper-looking meatball wearing shades, red cowboy boots and white gloves that could've been swiped from one of the California Raisins.

Those contributing their voices and culinary expertise to the project include folk heavyweights Pete Seeger, the late Dave Van Ronk, Julie "From a Distance" Gold, Tom Paxton and Jeff Daniels. Yes, *The Purple Rose of Cairo's* Jeff Daniels.

That *Pleasantville's* Technicolor hero also has a fantastic song about and recipe for tomato pudding was probably the single biggest surprise for those gathered on a recent Friday night for a *One Meat Ball* party: an ambitious endeavor to cook recipes from the cookbooklet while listening to the album. The liner notes say you can hire the folksingers themselves to come cook and sing for you, but it's more fun to do it yourself.

Since cooking all 27 recipes seemed a tad excessive, we settled on five that seemed to make a well-enough rounded meal. Vance Gilbert's "Philly Poached Pears" automatically made it onto the menu for the local connection, and because Gilbert's musical contribution is the tasty-sounding "Root Beer for Breakfast." They were followed by Daniels' tomato pudding (and song of the same name); chicken kofta meatballs from Van Ronk, who sings the classic title song; mushroom-sesame-tofu soup taken from Ithaca, N.Y.'s venerable Moosewood Restaurant; and rich custard pie from Debi Smith, who's joined by Doc Watson for the old-timey walkin' blues "Pie."

"I could enjoy this even more if I weren't so morally against pear poachers," quipped one friend, desperately trying to get quoted in this article. The "Philly Poached Pears" include a peanut-pumpkin-pistachio sauce (10 times fast—ready, go), which was delicious, despite not being especially Philadelphian. Gilbert drops plenty of his own personal food science into the homey directions, which read in part: "While the pears are poachin', put pumpkin puree, peanut butter and about 4 tablespoons of the tea in a saucepan and heat slowly, whisking it 'round gently with a whisk. Add the sugar and whisk some mo'. Be gentle—don't whisk till it gets all frothy. That's nasty."





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That kind of low-key grittiness pervades both the music and recipes of *One Meat Ball*, which, on the third time through the CD, one friend remarked sounded like a three-hour episode of *Kids Corner*.

Despite not looking particularly appetizing, Jeff Daniels' tomato pudding—along with its catchy accompanying song—was the evening's clear winner, surprising all with its mouth-watering sweetness.

The bare-bones recipe—by far the simplest one we tried—of bread, butter, brown sugar, tomatoes and basil went along nicely with the song's bluesy dobro and harmonica crunch, pleasing nearly all in this somewhat folk-music-averse crowd.

The custard pie was tasty as well, but when its oven-fresh surface bubble deflated, the top looked a bit like the extra folds of skin on a post-gastric-bypass-surgery patient. None of which took away from the rich flavor, or from Debi Smith and Doc Watson's bouncy, upbeat "Pie."

Dave Van Ronk, whose title-track singing sounds remarkably like Shel Silverstein reading *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, gives the recipe for chicken kofta, Middle Eastern/Indian-style spicy meatballs cooked with ground chicken breast. Even though we were missing the accompanying Greek tzatziki sauce the recipe recommends, only one meatball—so prophetically—remained at the end of the evening.

Also well-received was Moosewood Restaurant's mushroom-sesame-tofu soup—one of the book's nine "bonus recipes," along with caterer-to-the-stars Fern Gnesin's "Guacamole for the Dead," which apparently was popular among Jerry Garcia and co.

A full-fledged *One Meat Ball* party is messier than your traditional folk music experience, and in our crowd prompted a lively game of "Pete Seeger: Alive or Dead?" (For the record: alive and well.) But for indie rock friends who are at times hostile to the idea of acoustic guitars, there's no better equalizer than a full belly.

Christine Lavin Presents One Meat Ball: The Album, the Cookbooklet (Appleseed)

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