

# KARAOKE

## A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Our family group wandered into Astoria's Portway Tavern after a lively viewing of "Shanghai'd in Astoria." We weren't ready to call it a night, and fried food and cold beer was in order. Brushing the popcorn from our hair, we ducked in out of the autumn drizzle and beheld something strange and wonderful: Karaoke night was in full swing.

Curious, we found a table and took in the show.

Front and center was an elderly gentleman clad in denim and a large cowboy hat belting out Johnny Cash's "Ring Of Fire."

And he was good. Really, really good. He captured Cash's baritone to a tee, and the patrons clapped and whistled in approval as he shuffled to his bar stool to slake his well-earned thirst.

Next came a diminutive college-age girl in a pink T-shirt covered in sparkly hearts. A hush fell over the room. Was this where Bieber or One Direction would rear their ugly heads?

**'It's a fun way to blow off some steam and come out of your shell a little.'**

After paging through the song booklet and punching in a few keys on the karaoke machine, she broke into a fantastic rendition of Dolly Parton's "Jolene."

As if on cue, all the ladies in the room belted out "Jolene, Jolene, I'm begging you please don't take my man" in unison each time the chorus came around.

Everyone clapped vigorously as she curtsied and stepped down. The elderly cowboy sent her a drink.

There was a pause in the singing as everyone eyed the room for the next brave soul.

My wife was looking at me with arched eyebrows, and I could see the unspoken dare in her gaze: Go on, you know you want to.

Caught up in the moment, I suddenly wanted nothing more than to serenade her with REO



Karaoke at Manzanita Lighthouse Pub & Grub comes complete with costume choices.

Speedwagon's "Keep On Loving You" and maybe get drinks sent to me by swooning admirers. It certainly looked easy enough.

I asked our server what made karaoke so popular.

"It's a fun way to blow off some steam and come out of your shell a little," she said. She leaned in conspiratorially. "Not everyone should, though."

I gave that careful thought. Everyone has rock star dreams of grandeur, whether it's singing in the car or learning your first guitar chord. Maybe the responsible thing to do was recognize my limitations and stick to murdering my favorite songs in private.

I decided to stay on the spectator side of the stage, but knew I couldn't deny the urge for long.

Several nearby taverns feature karaoke regularly. In Astoria, the Portway runs karaoke Wednesday through Saturday, and the Labor Temple Diner & Bar starts the fun at 8 p.m. Friday through Sunday. In Seaside, you can sing your favorite tune from 9 p.m. to close Friday and Sunday at the Twisted Fish Steakhouse.

In Manzanita, the San Dune Pub and Manzanita Lighthouse Pub & Grub also feature karaoke regularly.

The San Dune regularly features an outfit

from Portland called Karaoke From Hell, a live band that accompanies karaoke enthusiasts. I imagine it's the closest you can get to feeling like David Lee Roth or Joan Jett for the evening, minus the spandex and hair spray.

Manzanita Lighthouse offers a regular weekly gig hosted by a DJ. For added entertainment, there's even a selection of costumes on hand, like feather boas, colorful wigs, and Elton John-style glasses. I was told it's called "Prop-aroke."

Sold on the costumes, I chose the Lighthouse and wandered in on a blustery evening before the holidays, determined to conquer karaoke.

My chosen song was "I Wanna Be Sedated" by The Ramones. The lyrics are easy and consist of a lot of "ba-ba-bamp-ba ba-ba-ba-bamp-ba."

Karaoke was already humming, and there were plenty of rock star contenders.

A group of women was sharing the stage and giggling their way through Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats."

The crowd hooted and hollered as the ladies returned to their light beers.

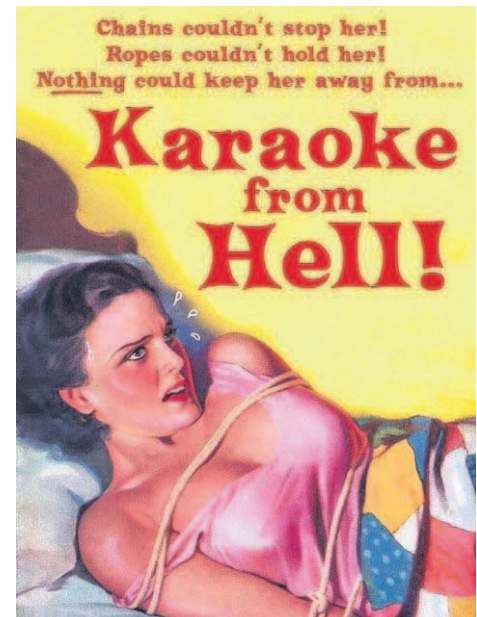
A young man took the stage, donned a novelty wig, and launched enthusiastically into a pop song I didn't recognize.

I ordered a drink and waited for my courage to crest. And waited. And waited.



Submitted photo

Karaoke From Hell is a regular gig at the San Dune Pub in Manzanita.



Submitted image courtesy Karaoke From Hell

Karaoke From Hell offers you the chance to sing karaoke with a live band.

Sadly, it never came.

Turns out, I'm a huge chicken, and there probably isn't enough beer in the world to change that.

Despite that, I discovered that karaoke is about fun, camaraderie and hearing some old favorites in a new way.

Luckily, there are plenty of people who are far braver and much less tone-deaf than I am.

Spectator or performer, it's fantastic entertainment for rainy Oregon Coast evenings.

## Coastal Life

Story by DAN HAAG