



THOMAS ROTT PHOTO

Features Editor Erick Bengel.

SCRATCHPAD

Reporters attempt karaoke at Portway

By **ERICK BENDEL**
COAST WEEKEND

The Daily Astorian's Edward Stratton got it into his head recently that we writers should do karaoke together sometime. He's been using it to venture outside his social comfort zone, he said. Good on him. Karaoke, if nothing else, forces you to care a lot less about what others think of you.

Normally I don't want people hearing me sing any more than I want them watching me crawl around in a dark parking lot looking for my car keys. And the two activities aren't dissimilar. My strategy for singing is to grope blindly around the musical scale in hopes that, by touching every note in a general range, I'll hit the right one by accident.

But since the newspaper folk rarely hang out en masse, and much of our daily banter is buttoned-down and mission-oriented, this seemed like it could be an interesting exercise in reporter bonding. Plus, we wanted to support this new devil-may-care version of Edward.

We showed up at Astoria's Portway Tavern on Friday night — I, Edward, Daily A reporters Katie Frankowicz and Jack Hefernan, the Cannon Beach's Gazette's Brenna Visser, and the Chinook Observer's Natalie St. John and Alyssa Evans.

Karaoke, Brenna cheered, is a good winter sport. But for non-singers, there's definitely a time and place.

The Portway, I've found, is a pretty safe space — not one of those venues where patrons act as if they paid good money to see real singers and make vocalists like me feel we somehow ripped them off. During our Portway outing, no one treated karaoke like a competition. Even the bad singers earned good-sport applause.

That said, we had to give Edward props for his audacity. This isn't his natural habitat, and he went all in. So we played along. Jack and I even joined him for an awkward rendition of "Tequila," that cop-out karaoke classic, emboldened by the eponymous spirit. ("I've never heard *that* one before," the bartender said to the room at large.)

Meanwhile, Brenna gave us "Hey Jude," and Natalie, "Saving All My Love." "This is all off the record," Natalie warned, inspiring Jack to wonder if "Off the Record" should be the name of our musical group.

As for Edward himself, well, mere words can't capture how jarring yet oddly compelling it is to watch this mild-mannered reporter belt out: "You gotta fight! — for your right! — to paaaaart-ayyy!" Let's face it, though: The Beastie Boys don't exactly demand a set of polished pipes.

But then he chose to sing "Blue Skies" ... and actually hit the notes without wobbling. He killed it.

Now, don't get me wrong. We all wanted to encourage Edward in his endeavor to become a crooner, but we all assumed we'd make fools of ourselves together. Sure, we'd bring ignominy to our corner of the Fourth Estate, but we'd be closer as co-workers and, dare I say it, friends. That's how much we love Edward.

Turns out, though, Edward just wanted to show off. We felt hustled. **CW**

coast weekend

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

arts & entertainment



ON THE COVER

Artist Sally Lackaff autographs the new book she co-wrote and illustrated during a signing event at the AVA Gallery in Astoria.

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See story on Page 8

4 THE ARTS
Doo-wop to Thin Lizzy
Musical revue returns to Seaside High School

7 COASTAL LIFE
Toy drive recital
Encore dancers bring in Christmas gifts for kids

8 FEATURE
'Sarah's Circus'
Sally Lackaff, 'Jake' Jacob co-authored children's book

FURTHER ENJOYMENT

MUSIC CALENDAR	5
CROSSWORD	6
SEE + DO	10, 11
CW MARKETPLACE.....	15, 16



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