



# Crab culture celebrated in Easton revue

## Extravaganza: Avalon Theatre will pay homage Nov. 8 to crustaceans and those who delight in their harvest.

Tom Horton  
October 24, 2003

SURELY, MANY readers must have wondered what Elvis Presley would have sung if he had been a Maryland crabber, poaching just over the state line:

Wella blessa my soul

What do I see

Virginia police boats comin' after me

I pull my crab scrapes

Right outa the mud - I'm a wreck - I'm all shook up!"

Then there's Sonny and Cher's hit single, "We Got Crabs, Babe," and the old Willie Nelson-Julio Iglesias favorite, "To All the Crabs I've Caught Before."

When I lived in the great Chesapeake crabbing center of Smith Island, the songs and stories flowed all summer from the watermen's wives, "picking" in their little shanties, transforming bushels of hard-edged crustaceans into succulent heaps of backfin.

Theirs was an honest poetry, born of work and acceptance. "Look, this is not the most glamorous job in the world - whenever a tourist sees me lookin' like some old workhorse, I hate it," one picker said. "But it's where we are and it's what we do."

Often, I'd ask older women whether they considered their lives happy. They had been "content" or "satisfied," they would answer.

For all we write about crabs as the stuff of crab cakes and commerce, and as an ecological indicator, we too seldom pause to simply celebrate them - both the creature and the human cultures grown up around their harvest.

That's going to be remedied for one magical evening, Saturday, Nov. 8, at the Avalon Theatre in downtown Easton, when bay singer, storyteller and poet Tom Wisner presents a one-time-only extravaganza known as "Crab Soup."

The show will feature - for the first time ever on stage - Smith Island picker Janice Marshall and accomplices, dismantling mounds of freshly steamed crabs and re-creating the atmosphere of an old-time bay crab shanty.

An assortment of first-rate bay musicians and storytellers will perform original works, from Bill Brennan and Paul Seydewitz's "Crab Jubilee" to Tom Vincent's "Blue Crab Blues," and one of my favorites, Wisner's "Dance Sideways:"

I wonder if some people

Ever wonder what its like,

To be put into a kettle,

And have the lid shut tight?

Wander in the darkness

You can't find your way around,

You are destined to become

The tastiest treat in town

Poems include Lucille Clifton's "Crabbing," Gilbert Byron's "Crab Talk" and Steven Ward's wonderful "Soft Crab Time in Crisfield."

Tickets for the 8 p.m. show are \$20. Call the Avalon at 410-820-8822, or try Ticket Master.

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