

# OBITUARY

## Howard Crabtree

By Brian Caffall  
PGN Contributing Writer

Howard Crabtree, creator, star and costume designer of the 1993 off-Broadway musical revue, "Howard Crabtree's Whoop-De-Doo," died June 28, 1996, of AIDS-related complications at the Bucks County farm he shared with his companion, Daniel Gates. He was 41.

Five days before his death, Crabtree completed work on "Howard Crabtree's When Pigs Fly," a collaboration with Mark Waldrop, who had worked with Crabtree on "Whoop-De-Doo." "When Pigs Fly" began performances Aug. 1 at the Douglas Fairbanks Theatre in New York. The production is dedicated to Crabtree's memory.

Crabtree was born in Excelsior Springs, Mo., and had

his first show-business successes as a dancer. He turned to costume design while working with the Atlantic Ballet of Canada, and later worked as a dresser for several Broadway musicals, including "La Cage Aux Folles," "Starlight Express," "Legs Diamond" and "Phantom of the Opera."

In 1987, Crabtree created the first of his cabaret revues, "Howard and Drew Meet the Invisible Man," a show which received three nominations for Manhattan Association of Cabarets and Clubs awards. That show was followed in 1990 by Crabtree's first collaboration with Mark Waldrop, "Whatnot," which was produced off-Broadway.

It was the 1993 revue, "Howard Crabtree's Whoop-De-Doo," though, that solidified Crabtree's reputation for

creating outlandish and witty costumes for equally bizarre situations. Among the musical numbers in that show was a giant nose serenading a package of Kleenex tissues, and another involving "Follies"-style costumes made entirely out of picnic supplies.

Crabtree was also renowned for the elaborate hats he designed for celebrities to wear in the Broadway Easter Bonnet competition, an annual fund-raiser for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. One 6-foot-high creation included the Manhattan skyline, lighted theater marquees and a revolving helicopter.

In the last few months, Crabtree was unable to travel to New York for rehearsals and costume fittings for "When Pigs Fly." Instead, he worked from his Bucks County home.

Of his collaborator's work on their final show together, Waldrop said, "Against all odds, he finished the costumes for it just before he died—and they're his best, funniest, most sophisticated creations ever. They're a virtual guarantee that every performance of this show will be a celebration of Howard's humor and wit."

In addition to Gates, Crabtree is survived by his parents and two brothers. ▼

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