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JACK JACOBS
longtime listener, on Blossom broadcast by Garrison Keillor (right)



JOCELYN WILLIAMS/Akron Beacon Journal

‘Prairie Home’ radio show a feast for ears more than eyes at Blossom

Lake Wobegon faithful enjoy performance by Garrison Keillor, friends

By Stephen Dyer
Beacon Journal staff writer

It was a pilgrimage – a journey to Lake Wobegon for most of the 8,000 or so fans who ventured to Blossom Music Center yesterday to see Garrison Keillor and his live broadcast of *A Prairie Home Companion*.

The event helped celebrate the 50th anniversary of WKSIJ (89.7-FM).

It's hard to imagine a crowd more itchy to laugh, clap or smile for Keillor's performance of this National Public Radio staple. And that's what the crowd spent most of the evening doing.

Whether it was a tale of Lake Wobegon fishermen meeting up with an eccentric inventor, legendary Blues guitarist Robert Lockwood Jr. sounding every bit the scratchy Robert Johnson protege he is, the soft, whimsical singing of Keillor and Lynn Peterson, or the snappy playing of former Duke Ellington band members Barrie Lee Hall Jr., Bill Easley and Arthur Baron, the

crowd went along with it. Enjoyed itself. Mouthed the words. Laughed out loud. Erupted in applause.

Fans kicked off their shoes, ducked under boxes to avoid the rain and watched their favorite radio program.

It was like a beloved uncle stopping over for a couple hours while he passed through town on his way to some exotic place.

The radio show mostly relied on the talents of its cast – Keillor, Tim Russell, Sue Scott and sound effects wizard Tom Keith.

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Prairie

Keillor briefly muses about Northeast Ohio

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A dangling, lighted moon and a home straight from a Norman Rockwell canvas were the only backdrops to the show.

"I found myself listening more" than watching, said longtime *Prairie* listener Jack Jacobs

of Bath. "Watching radio is good."

Jacobs was especially glad to finally see why the audience applauded and laughed at moments in the show that couldn't be seen through audio waves.

"The humor's more real," said John Sheridan of Cleveland Heights. "Sometimes you don't get it on the radio."

During one of Keillor's stories, called *The Voice in the Night*, a sound was created that was supposed to resemble someone's innards being turned inside out. A crinkle of plastic foam and a squeaky balloon-rub later, the illusion was complete.

During Keillor's 20-minute Lake Wobegon story, Jacobs, who had never seen the show, stood at the rear of the pavilion, his head turned sideways, listening and smiling.

Phil and Jen McDowell of Pennsylvania had tickets near the front, but thanks to annoying neighbors and poor sound they spent most of the evening listening to the show at the rear of the pavilion.

"We'd be having more fun in our back yard," said Jen McDowell, 33.

But "we're glad to see it once," said her 36-year-old husband.

Keillor didn't tell many Northeast Ohio jokes, saving most of the local talk for his 15-minute warm-up set.

He recalled days when there were "parts of Lake Erie (that weren't) safe to walk on."

A few Cleveland Indians references, a John Glenn mention and Minnesota Gov. Jesse "the Body" Ventura ("who's out in outer space") jokes later, he was ready to start.

"See you after the show, hope you enjoy it!" Keillor announced to raucous cheering.

group has no site yet for its memorial and is not ready to raise money.

The group does have the model of the statue (created by East High School graduate John Chalk) and has been visiting other memorials to get

"No, ma'am, I'm just back from Korea," Maier recalled telling her. "She looked at me funny, and said, 'Is that a hospital?'"

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Plenty of light-hearted jokes floated through the drizzly Blossom night. None got a bigger response than Keillor's reference to a Baptist church in Texas called "Six Flags over Jesus Church," where 15,000 people attended.

But after all the jokes, all the nostalgic early rock 'n' roll and Duke Ellington tunes had gone

silent, a few faithful fans stood and watched as within 15 minutes of the show's conclusion, the show's Mayberry-looking home started coming down. And the Lake Wobegon moon went away.

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