



TENNESSEAN FILE PHOTO

A *Prairie Home Companion* host Garrison Keillor, left, on the set with friend and guest Chet Atkins. Keillor came up with the idea for his radio program in 1974 while working on a *New Yorker* article about the *Grand Ole Opry*.

'Prairie Home Companion' thanks Atkins for the music

Garrison Keillor, host of the public radio program *Prairie Home Companion*, broke the news of Chet Atkins' death to the show's audience during last evening's live broadcast of the show at Tanglewood Music Center in western Massachusetts.

Atkins and Keillor had been friends for many years, with the Nashvillian appearing several times on the popular radio show.

About halfway through the first hour of the show, after an appearance by Mary Chapin Carpenter, Keillor stepped to the microphone.

"Our love goes out to Leona Atkins, down in Nashville, and daughter, Merle, on the death this morning of our friend Chet Atkins," the bass-throated announcer said.

There was an audible moan from the packed house.

Keillor described Atkins "as a beautiful man who grew up feeling strange and awkward as

we all do, out in eastern Tennessee, and for whom the guitar was his great consolation and his great love."

"He was a sweet man with a gift for friendship who loved stories, who loved radio, who loved jokes."

As a tribute to the Nashville guitarist, Keillor encouraged the audience to sing along with him in a revised rendition of a Carter family tune called *There'll be Joy, Joy, Joy Up in My Father's House*.

One of the revised verses started with "He'll be playing his guitar up in my Father's house..."

Finally, Keillor asked the audience to whistle a verse and the song ended with an Atkins-like guitar solo.

Over the final bars, Keillor said: "Thank you, Chet, thank you for the music."

The show will be rebroadcast today at 3 p.m. on WPLN, 90.3 FM. ■

— LEON ALLIGOOD