

Keillor dishes up classical tunes, cornpone

By Richard Dyer
GLOBE STAFF

LENOX — Garrison Keillor broadcasted "A Prairie Home Companion" live from Tanglewood for the third consecutive season Saturday night, and 11,018 people showed up to watch and listen.

The Stockbridge Bowl isn't Lake Wobegon, so Keillor had some mild fun at the expense of the locals and the summer folk — the Volvo mechanics and the kind of audience members who throw croissants and organic tomatoes at performers who displease them.

No croissants or organic tomatoes flew through the air Saturday; the audience was Keillor's audience, and it went with the flow. Keillor did pay tribute to classical music, and there was an impressively poised teenage violinist from Bulgaria, Bella Hristova, who came over from string boot camp at Meadowmount School of Music in New York to play a Wieniawski Caprice, a Heifetz Debussy transcription, and a country number about letting the cat out.

The Juilliard String Quartet was on hand to perform two movements of Haydn's "Sunrise" Quartet, elegantly, and to play itself in one of Keillor's sketches

A Prairie Home Companion

Presented by Minnesota Public Radio and the Boston Symphony Orchestra
At: Tanglewood, Saturday evening

about gumshoe Guy Noir. "It's harder to get a seat on the Juilliard Quartet than on the Supreme Court," Keillor quipped.

The sketch was about the disappearance of violist Samuel "Dusty" Rhodes, whom Guy tracked down in a comedy club called Berserkshire. Rhodes was telling a string of awful jokes to that croissant-throwing audience, but Guy got him back to Tanglewood in time. All four members of the quartet, and especially Rhodes, proved good sports and surprisingly adroit radio actors. They looked so good standing up that one wanted to hear them sing a barbershop quartet.

The rest of the show combined sophistication and cornpone in the usual quotients. Guitarist Pat Donohue from the Guy's All-Star Shoe Band offered a tribute to Chet Atkins, which accompanied Keillor's delivery of selections from Atkins's letters; fiddler Peter Ostroushko played a loping number called "Tecumseh." Jazz vo-



AP FILE PHOTO

Garrison Keillor brought "A Prairie Home Companion" to Tanglewood Saturday night.

calist Karrin Allyson sang "Relief," the bossa nova number "Little Boat of Love," and a duet with Keillor. She has musical imagination and a tone that goes down like good bourbon, although her sense of pitch can be wayward.

Keillor offered a complex rap about Leonard Bernstein to the rhythms of "West Side Story" whose point was that Bernstein was both Beauty and the Beast. But it was Keillor's monologue

that brought down the house. It was about tomato competitions in Lake Wobegon, and it featured sallies on tent caterpillars ("they can eat your lawnchairs") and store-bought tomatoes ("they aren't grown; they're strip-mined").

There were amusing phony commercials for Powdermilk Biscuits, for the Catchup Advisory Board, and for the power drink Red Alert ("with ginko biloba"). Fred Newman provided the sound effects; he's the heir to Mel Blanc and Spike Jones. The actual sponsors (Lands End Direct Merchants and Select Comfort mattresses) were briefly but discreetly acknowledged both on the air and through small banners.

What did people look at while they were listening to the radio? Well, the tour "set" had some placards about the American Duct Tape Council and a large image of a tomato for the Catchup Advisory Board (it appeared to be taking a bath in mustard). The public saw a very smooth, savvy, and professional operation that was trying to sound simple and homespun — a little bit like Keillor himself, the somewhat overbearing cracker-barrel philosopher in a Wall Street power suit and a bright red tie.