

# 'Prairie Home,' Bangor audience share happy eve

BY EMILY BURNHAM  
OF THE NEWS STAFF

BANGOR — Garrison Keillor charmed a capacity crowd at the Bangor Auditorium on Saturday evening during a live broadcast of his long-running radio program "A Prairie Home Companion."

Tickets for the show, sponsored by Maine Public Radio and the Maine Center for the Arts, had been sold out since October. The 3,500 audience members came from all over the state and New England to see Keillor and his crew of actors and musicians bring their brand of warm, literate American humor to Maine for the first time in 10 years.

As with that 1998 broadcast, Maine singer-songwriter David Mallett was a special guest. Mallett performed several of his own tunes,  
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Keillor

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# Keillor

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including a piece from his recent CD, "The Fable True," featuring Mallett's readings of excerpts from Henry David Thoreau's writings on the woods and rivers of Maine, set to music. People of all stripes and ages knew the words and sang along to Mallett's classic "The Garden Song" ("Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow"), a song covered by artists as disparate as Pete Seeger and the Muppets.

Maine was the topic of much of the humor of the evening, ranging from a hilarious story about giant, steroid-enhanced lobsters taking revenge on the people of Maine for years of care-

less slaughter, to a performance by Keillor and voice actors Sue Scott and Tim Russell portraying a married couple debating whether to visit Maine or San Diego for a vacation. He wants to go to Maine to see the trees and the ocean, but she wants to go to San Diego — so she doesn't need to bring bug spray and rain gear.

There was even a rendition of "The Maine Stein Song," played by house band The Guys All-Star Shoe Band.

Four Maine fiddlers were on the bill — Lucien Mathieu of Westbrook, Carter Newell of Damariscotta, Doug Protvik of Woolwich and Milo Stanley, Protvik's 10-year-old fiddle apprentice — and played the "Sailor's Hornpipe" and an assortment of sea chanteys and traditional folk tunes.

Pulitzer-Prize winning poet Maxine Kumin made the trip from her farm in New Hampshire to read aloud several of her poems. Keillor called Kumin his "heroine," noting the concision and passion contained within her work — virtues that he said are common to New England.

Sound-effects man Fred Newman had his own special segment, detailing how he came to hold his unique position making weird sounds for radio broadcasts. Keillor delighted in forcing Newman to make all kinds of noises, from humpback whales and peacocks to whipped cream and espresso machines — the latter of which he asked Newman to do repeatedly, just to give him a hard time.

As a warm-up to the broadcast, Keillor entered the crowd before going on-air and entertained them with a song, meandering through the audience and into the bleachers, greeting late-comers as they took their seats. A few audience members were surprised to see the tall, owlish Keillor standing right behind them, and several were rewarded with handshakes and genteel pecks on the cheek.

If he hadn't won them over already with his nearly 30 years of broadcasting of "A Prairie Home Companion," Keillor certainly had them eating out of the palm of his hand before the show even started.

The house may have been packed, but the atmosphere was as intimate, relaxed and congenial as an evening spent sitting in your living room, listening to the radio with your family and friends.

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