

# Keillor, crew give 'Prairie' broadcast Southwest flair

By Doug Pullen  
El Paso Times

LAS CRUCES — When you're a tall, gawky and loquacious Minnesotan named Garrison Keillor, just about anywhere is home.

Even if it's a small, but growing university town one time zone away in the desert of Southern New Mexico, where Billy the Kid roamed, cowboys worked the trail and "it's immoral to have a green lawn."

Or so the star attraction would have us believe.

Of course, it's not immoral to have Keillor, one of public radio's most beloved personalities, and his "A Prairie Home Companion," one of public radio's most beloved programs, in your backyard.

It was a big backyard — New Mexico State University's Pan American Center — where Keillor, his Royal Academy of Radio Actors, Guy's All-Star Shoe Band, singer Prudence Johnson and guests Chris Thile (Nickel Creek, the Punch Brothers), West Texas legend Joe Ely and young Albuquerque sibling duo Sorela put on a live radio show Saturday afternoon for a crowd of 4,050 fans.

That's just the size of the crowd inside the Pan Am, converted into an intimate theater with the stage, festooned with video screens, fake ads, a home front and a street lamp that read "On Air."

The national audience for the show, replete with splashes of local flavor (and Keillor's raves about the salsa backstage), was far bigger, with more than 4 million people tuning in on more than 580 public radio stations across the country, including El Paso's KTEP-FM (88.5) and Las Cruces' KRWG-FM (90.7), which hosted Saturday's afternoon broadcast, the show's first stop in the area.

The beauty of "Prairie Home" live is how quickly and smoothly it flows, and how much fun it is to watch live radio being made, from the coffee cups the actors used to sound like they're on the phone to Keillor's visual cues to his band and guests.



Shari Velepando / Las Cruces Sun-News

Garrison Keillor read over his script Saturday as he and the cast of "A Prairie Home Companion" broadcast their 1,181st show live Saturday at the Pan American Center in Las Cruces.

fee cups the actors used to sound like they're on the phone to Keillor's visual cues to his band and guests.

In the desert version of "Prairie Home," Keillor — looking boyish in his black suit, white shirt, red tie, red socks and red running shoes — was his own opening act, starting the festivities 10 minutes before the 4 p.m. airtime. He sauntered through the crowd from the floor to the concourse level, leading earnest singalongs of "America the Beautiful" and "Home

on the Range" in his best church voice before joining Prudence Johnson onstage for a pretty version of Freddy Fender's "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," complete with a verse in Spanish.

Saturday's show included many of the staples fans have come to love, but with local flavors. Gumshoe Guy Noir pursued a derelict menagerie owner in Las Cruces, where he had to settle for "huevos toast" because the heavily accented waitress didn't know what French toast was.

In "The Lives of the Cowboys," Tim "The Man of Many Voices" Russell's curmudgeonly Dusty thought he was going on a cruise, not to Las Cruces. Russell also did a spot-on Sen. John McCain touting his desert toughness over Sen. Barack Obama's Midwest-by-way-of-Hawaii softness. "Has he ever watched coyotes eat his house cats," he asked indignantly.

It was clear that the reflective Keillor was more interested in evoking his nostalgic images of the old West than trying to mine humor from border fences or coyotes of the two-legged variety. A tasteful medley of songs from the celluloid singing cowboys of old, Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, was both a fine showcase for Keillor's and Thile's harmonies and a warm reminder that the host had more than Lake Wobegon on his mind as a boy.

Doug Pullen may be reached at dpullen@elpasotimes.com; 546-6397.

Advertisement

## "What If There Were Back Pain Treatments Your Doctor Didn't Know About?"

El Paso - Have you tried pills, injections, therapy, surgery, or massage? Dr. Kathryn Keith, DC is offering "The Severe Back, Sciatica, And disc Pain Guide" for local residents suffering from severe back, sciatica and leg pain. Discover why your treatments may have failed and possibly a new solution. Call 1-800-432-6355 (24 hour recorded message) or go to:

[www.orderfreediscreport.com](http://www.orderfreediscreport.com)

569424