

The costumes range from retro cowgirl to post-modern hippie. Musicians Fisher, Peter Williams, and Karles Saucedo McQuade ably put the drama in melodrama, but their playing sometimes drowns out the dialogue — soften it, fellas. The set, by Rick Fisher, is silly and serviceable. Kerry Kehoe is credited with Wallpaper Application Advisement.

Inspiration turned to perspiration near the climax, with sloppy choreography undermining some clever visual gags. Tighten it up, please. Otherwise it's a pretty good show — not quite all aces, but with enough face cards and jokers in the pack to make the game worth playing.

— Robert Nott

*The 2008 Fiesta Melodrama plays Thursdays through Sundays through Sept. 7 at Santa Fe Playhouse, 142 E. De Vargas St., 988-4262. Tickets are \$17, \$20, and pay-what-you-wish on Thursday.*

**A Prairie Home Companion**  
Santa Fe Opera, Aug. 26

### Keilloring us softly with his song

Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon is a place that no longer exists — maybe it never did. It's more of a dream environment, where average people chase hopes, fantasies, illusions, and in some cases, nightmares. We know that place well, though, because we've all been there at one time or another.

Keillor has been bringing us his radio series *A Prairie Home Companion* weekly since 1974. The program combines elements from the work of the late radio personality Fred Allen, the cornball television variety show *Hee Haw*, and Keillor's own Midwestern upbringing; it provides music, comedy, theatrical skits, and a lot of sweet and funny sermonizing about the dumb human things we do to be happy.

Keillor's warm-up monologue was entirely Santa Fe-based (of our annual Zozobra tradition he noted, "I come from the Midwest, which is full of gloomy old men. But we don't burn them — we freeze them."), and many references throughout the show brought the program back to Santa Fe. Only near the end, when he delivered a lengthy "News From Lake Wobegon," did he focus on his fictional hometown.

Like the burning of Zozobra, Keillor's goal is to wipe our gloom away, and he mostly succeeded. But the normal two-hour running time of the radio show was stretched to just over three hours for this live performance, and even for die-hard fans like me, that was at least 30 minutes too long. Missing was a Guy Noir sketch as well as the antics of the lovable cowboys Dusty and Lefty. Gone were any theatrical skits, actually, except for some comic byplay between Keillor and his renowned sound-effects sidekick

Fred Newman (his rendition of "Moon River" as performed by Donald Duck is pretty good).

This particular show stressed the harmonizing, and it was top-flight all around. Guest star Suzy Bogguss duetted with Keillor on several tunes and delivered sterling solos on "Outbound Plane" and "Someday Soon," but she disappeared for most of the second act. Lead guitarist Pat Donohue performed a rousing rendition of Chuck Berry's "Memphis, Tennessee," and keyboard maestro/music director Richard Dworsky led the ensemble in a spirited honky-tonk instrumental piece.

This show was a love song to America, to family, and to the audience. Keillor delivered musical sonnets on such topics as home-cooked meals and high-school crushes. He did not, however, lead the crowd in a singalong of "God Bless America," as he often does. At times he took on a W.C. Fields tone as he related not-necessarily-true tales of youthful indiscretions he engaged in while cowboying in Northern New Mexico and playing cards in Santa Fe. One hilarious highlight was his explanation of how a tube of "shameless" crimson lipstick came between him and his beloved. He also recited an amusing take on the famous baseball poem "Casey at the Bat." There were songs about loving the wrong person and of trouble knocking at our doors — this is real life, all right.

Shaggy dog stories abound in Keillor's world. His tales have a beginning and a middle but not always an ending, probably because some things never really end. Even after the protagonist of one story lies in his casket as it is lowered into the ground, the guy is still thinking and talking (to himself, at least), noting that he's wearing the same suit he wore to other people's funerals. He wonders, what's next?

Though Keillor exudes a comfortable, easygoing air, he tells us that this is not a benevolent world we live in. That doesn't mean we can't be kind to one another. *A Prairie Home Companion* may not reflect America as it is — or even as it was — but rather the way we want it to be: warmhearted even when the world is cold, forgiving when we deceive our brothers and spouses and friends to tackle dreams that remain out of reach. That stuff doesn't just happen in Lake Wobegon.

— R.N.



Natalie Guillén/The New Mexican

Quick on the draw: Garrison Keillor with Pat Donohue