

Lake Wobegon casts spell here

■ Storyteller Garrison Keillor spins the web of his wonderful "hometown" for delighted audience at Fulton fundraiser.

By JANE HOLAHAN
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Garrison Keillor brought the news from Lake Wobegon to a sold-out audience at the Fulton Opera House Sunday night, proving once again that nobody tells a story or captures the truths about human nature better than that Prairie Home Companion guy.

Keillor did not bring his cast and musicians from the popular National Public Radio program with him. It was just the entertainer, with a stool, a table, a microphone and a bottle of water, which he never drank from during his hour and 45-minute show.

The evening was a fundraiser for the Fulton, and it marked Keillor's first appearance in Central Pennsylvania.

The crowd loved him, Keillor seemed to be having fun and the result was a warm, glowing evening filled with gentle humor and plenty of small, priceless insights.

Keillor started the show by singing a stream-of-consciousness hymn that covered everything from believing in God ("When I die like other folks, I don't want to hear you're a hoax") to the banking crisis to his latest artistic endeavors ("I've

been writing sonnets lately, I'm so proud of myself").

The long hymn was classic Keillor, filled with wit, wisdom and charming silliness.

Dressed in a light gray jacket, jeans, a bright red tie, bright red socks and red sneakers, Keillor immediately segued into "It's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon..." and the crowd cheered.

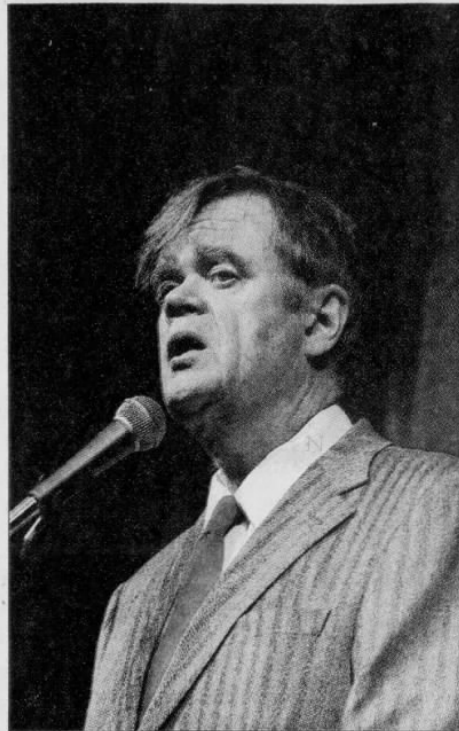
Lake Wobegon is the mythical small Minnesota town filled with prickly residents which Keillor talks about every week on his radio show.

Somehow, through the stories about the Bunsens and the Inqvists and the Lutherans and the Unitarians and the old Norwegian bachelors, Keillor makes the town a universal place.

Keillor noted that Lake Wobegon had its first frost of the season, evoking "an air of mortality" along with a distinct mothball smell, as folks brought out their winter clothes.

He moved on to the Chatterbox Cafe, where a lot of the action takes place in Lake Wobegon.

Clint and Irene Bunsen were on his mind. He mused about how the couple, married 30 years now, always got chili and grilled cheese sandwiches at the Chatter-



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Garrison Keillor performs Sunday night at a fundraiser at the Fulton Theatre.

box and didn't talk much.

Regret about choices we make is always in the air in Lake Wobegon.

Keillor moved on, talking about the great Herring Famine of the 1870s, which brought all the Norwegian settlers to Lake Wobegon and how his people — all Sanctified Brethren — preferred the Old Testament, "back when God smote people and smote them hard."

The joy of listening to Keillor spin his tales is in not knowing where they will go next and when he will pause for a moment and make you gulp hard at an insight before he continues on.

He pointed out that his family saw life as an illusion; they preferred the darkness to the light and sang him lullabies about dying children when he was a baby.

"But our teachers taught us that life was a gift and we should savor it because it was so brief," Keillor said, remembering classic poems he was taught at 13 along with the lyrics to Jerry Lee Lewis' "Great Balls of Fire."

He remembered several Lake Wobegon men whose lives were destroyed by lust and that somehow segued to

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his Uncle Jack, married to his favorite aunt, Evelyn.

The rest of Keillor's monologue was about Aunt Evelyn's funeral, involving gigantic duck decoys, a secret lover named Raoul and the Sons of Knute, who make an appear-

ance in almost every Lake Wobegon story.

In this day and age of loud, tacky and empty entertainment, a quiet evening with Garrison Keillor is a tonic — a tonic that went down just fine at the Fulton Sunday night.

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