

Keillor bids farewell with memorable show

By JEFF KORBELIK
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Prior to the start of Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion," an usher said to a patron that it looked like "everybody is here."

Indeed, people packed Pinewood Bowl Friday night for his America the Beautiful

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Tour, a special PHC event that Keillor's calling his farewell tour. He's expected to retire from his popular public radio show next year.

"I feel like I'm 36," Garrison sang, as he strolled through the Pinewood crowd at the outset, "but I'm 73," later

adding, "I have no regrets ... because of memory loss."

Jokes, like those, were many as Garrison and crew, which included sound effects wizard Frank Newman, singer-songwriter Sarah Jarosz and The Radio Rhubarb Band, led by pianist Richard Dworsky, entertained the full house for 2½ hours.

"What a gorgeous concrete temple," he said of the amphitheater early in the first set, looking very at ease in his khaki suit accented with a bright red tie and tennis shoes. "It's like music-henge."

Although it wasn't a live broadcast of Prairie Home Companion, it played out

like one, with Keillor mixing music with favorite bits from the radio show, including Guy Noir, Private Eye; Fred Farrell's "Animal Calls"; "The Lives of the Cowboys"; and, of course, stories from Lake Wobegon.

The latter proved to be quite entertaining as the host meandered through the crowd for a second time, sharing a story that, par for course, meandered, too. It started and finished with the statue of the unknown Norwegian found in the small town, with tales of Babe Ruth, a parasailer, camping in freezing temperatures and more sandwiched in between.

While the stories were

entertaining, the show excelled with its music. Keillor shared the stage with the mandolin-playing Jarosz on a number of duets, including a couple of Greg Brown covers ("Early" and "The Cheapest Kind"). Jarosz wowed the audience, singing three solo numbers, and Keillor tugged at heartstrings, first with a song by Nebraska author Willa Cather and later with an Irish ballad.

They made for a memorable evening and proved to be a great way to say goodbye. Thanks, Garrison. We're going to miss you.

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