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## A tough job critiquing Keillor, crew

By KEN FUSON  
Register Staff Writer

AMES, IA. — This is the review that nobody wanted to write. After all, what's there to say about Garrison Keillor and "A Prairie Home Companion" that hasn't already been said? That he's a genius.

### REVIEW

a modern-day Mark Twain, a force for good in a sometimes cruel world? It's all been said before.

One friend said he would be reduced to a "fawning sycophant" if forced to review Saturday night's show. And as we all know, what's the fun of critiquing something that you can't criticize?

Well, it's a tough job, being a patsy in the rough-and-tumble world of reviews, but somebody has to do it.

Keillor and his crew were brilliant Saturday night, the Ames leg of "A Prairie Home Companion's" third annual farewell tour. They gave a full house no shortage of reasons for canceling the Memorial Day camping trip and staying in Ames to watch the show.

The Hopeful Gospel Quartet sang toe-tapping revival tunes ("You'd never know we were from Minnesota," Keillor said.) They told jokes; they even performed an old-fashioned radio drama, "Buster the Show Dog."

Demanding center stage, in a light suit and his trademark red socks and suspenders, was Keillor, the tall, shy man with the deep voice.

"It's so nice to be in this part of Iowa," he told the group, recalling an October 1981 concert in Ames. Doug Brown of WOI radio, which broadcast Saturday's performance, said that marked one of Prairie Home's first trips outside of St. Paul, Minn.

"Took a long time for the coast to clear," Keillor said, explaining his absence.

He belongs here. His brand of gentle humor plays better here than in Minnesota, where some folks think he is making fun of the small-town lifestyle. Actually, and this shouldn't be much of a revelation, Keillor honors them.

He does so by poking fun at pretensions, such as the commercial for the American Fat Institute — "The stuff that keeps the body loose and comfortable."

While Keillor is the star, he is surrounded by a talented cast, including singer Kate MacKenzie, pianist Richard Dworsky, singers Robin and Linda Williams, and Tom Keith and Dan Rowles, the men who provide the sound effects and many of the various voices.

All the old friends were present — the news from Lake Wobegon, the Sons of Knute ("Our kapes are made from the skins of hundreds of wall-eyes") and a Keillor-led rendition of the song, "Tell me Why."

I'll tell you what, the people who watched Saturday's performance when they left: They were hoping that Keillor & Company keep showing up to say farewell.