

# A sense of community pervades an evening in old Lake Wobegon

By Robert Eisler  
Contributing Reviewer

Like the lamp burning behind lace-curtained windows of the weathered clapboard farmhouse at center stage, humorist Garrison Keillor's monologues cast a warm glow over a sold-out audience Sunday night at the Midland Theater.

Keillor, dressed in a powder blue suit, pink shirt, red tie and matching red socks, and his "Prairie Home Companion" company held forth for more than two hours with a blend of homespun humor, comedic set pieces, gospel and bluegrass.

In a show billed as the "Third Annual Farewell Tour," Keillor brought to life on the Midland stage

## Theater review

the familiar denizens of the fictional Lake Wobegon, Minn. The responsive crowd embraced the material like a long-awaited letter from home, greeting each bit with sustained applause.

Interweaving Lake Wobegon monologues with musical interludes, Keillor and company pieced together an idyllic tribute to solid Middle American values. Lake Wobegon is the kind of place that can be rocked to its very foundations by news of marital trouble

between the town's Lutheran minister and his wife.

Keillor's insightful observations, laced liberally with humor, paint a comforting picture of a place that seems solidly rooted in the country's not-too-distant rural past.

Fans of the popular National Public Radio show welcomed such "Prairie Home" fixtures as "Buster the Show Dog," a stream-of-consciousness style radio show featuring the talented Tom Keith, who unleashes a grab bag of sound effects during a rambling episode of the serial program.

Other clever bits include the "4-H Players" depicting the random thoughts of a group of elevator passengers as they ascend to the 52nd floor of the Acme Building.

Audience members get to eavesdrop on the mental musings of this social microcosm made up of a raging anti-feminist, a comic traveler, an urban paranoid and a singles-bar cruiser.

On the musical front, Robin and Linda Williams were in fine voice as they acquitted themselves admirably on some intricate two-part harmonies in such numbers as "Early" and "Rhythm of Love."

The singers proved to be equally adept at musical parody, re-emerging in rhinestones and gold lame as Mavis and Marvin Smiley. With Keillor providing the high-pressure huckster's rap, the Smileys offered excerpts from their latest album,

"Broadway Bluegrass," in which Rodgers and Hammerstein came out sounding like "Rocky Top Tennessee."

Throughout the skillfully staged show, Keillor's seemingly genuine affection for small-town life and its

sometimes peculiar institutions was a pervasive theme. As the monologist put it in his gently worded epilogue: "We've got to have a strong community in order to give each of us a little slack as individuals."

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