

## **STAGE REVIEW**

# Keillor's 3rd Annual Farewell Show Sounded Familiar, Thank Goodness

By DAN SULLIVAN,  
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I used to think that Garrison Keillor was a guy I had worked with on the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Then Keillor came to a luncheon at the Los Angeles Times. I clapped him on the back. "Boy, have you come a long way." He looked around, and it wasn't the same person at all. If that wasn't embarrassing.

Everybody makes mistakes, however. Keillor probably shouldn't have quit his "A Prairie Home Companion" show two years ago and gone off to live in Denmark. But then if he hadn't left the show, he couldn't have returned to it, as he did Saturday afternoon at the Universal Amphitheatre. Before a sold-out house too. As Martin Luther put it: "Sin strongly."

It was billed as "A Prairie Home  
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## KEILLOR

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Companion's" third annual farewell show, an idea that Keillor may have gotten from Jack Benny. He plans to do one of them a year, as well as a new radio show. I think we can put up with that.

It's not a show that makes demands on the nervous system. It is more valleys than peaks. Saturday's show was an averagely good one, featuring music by the Hopeful Gospel Quartet and Butch Thompson; a guest shot by Mavis and Marvin Smiley; the latest episode of "Buster the Show Dog" (Buster has relocated in New York, like Keillor), and the latest news from Lake Wobegon, including the story behind the Ingeqvists' breakup.

The show was being broadcast live, but the red ON THE AIR sign was the only way to know it. Somebody must have been running around backstage with a stopwatch, but from out front, one thing just sort of led to another. Intermission was a chance for the

audience to stretch legs and sing "Tell Me Why" (first the women, then the men), but from the dynamic point of view, this show is all intermission.

Very soothing too, after the jab-jab-jab of TV. Like Robert Wilson's shows, "A Prairie Home Companion" risks being boring, in the interest of stimulating the viewer's alpha waves. An excellent show for the nervous.

It takes another risk: folksiness. Keillor fell into it in his last song, in which it was noted that at Oak and Main, they know your name. Yes, but what are they saying behind your back? Let's not take this worship of the small town too far.

The news from Lake Wobegon never does. Saturday's report involved Pastor Ingeqvist's wife, Judy, who had been called upon to do one more corporal work of charity than she could bear, especially after being cheated (and that was the only word for it) out of a trip to San Diego.

Something had to give. In this case, it was a church window. However, Keillor said, things seem to be OK between the Ingeqvists

now, and in Lake Wobegon, people will settle for "seems."

Keillor told it as a two-part story, weaving in the tale of a '57 pink Oldsmobile whose seats folded down into a bed, and the saga of a smelly old dog who had become obsessed with catching fish. Again, it all came together with no apparent effort, which could not have been the case.

The show's structure has always vaguely suggested that of a religious service, with Keillor's monologue as the sermon and the music (jazz, country, gospel) as the hymns. What is being celebrated is the ordinariness and the unexpectedness of it all. This leaves room for silliness, as when Marvin and Mavis (really, Robin and Linda Williams) do their bluegrass version of "I Could Have Danced All Night," unavailable in any store—not that any store would carry it.

Somewhere in the middle of the show comes the epistle, when Keillor passes on messages from one listener to the other. If you don't know Dave in Duluth, who cares that Sheila in Phoenix is pulling for him on his bar exam? Yet this part

of the service always puts me away. It has something to do with the size of the country and something to do with alpha waves.

Keillor had fun with the notion that Saturday's show was being broadcast from sunny Southern California, with its cerulean skies and its casually elegant men and women, people who had finally succeeded in getting their lives together.

When a small-town boy talks like that, watch your wallet. But it was good to have him back. We saw it coming, of course.



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