



Garrison Keillor

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By Bob Hoover

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It might be possible to divide the world into two groups: Those who appreciate Garrison Keillor and those who don't.

After all, here is a man who has made a successful career out of being Minnesotan, Lutheran and shy, a combination that doesn't appeal to everyone.

Last night, the Keillor combination, accompanied by conductor Philip Brunelle eased pleasantly through a couple of hours with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra as part of its Pops Season.

His fans — many of whom were in the orchestra — were hypnotized. The others, including the impassive gentleman next to me, were not amused.

Thirteen years of live radio have made the tall, gawky Keillor a commanding stage presence. He is at home up there with his microphone, able somehow in cavernous Heinz Hall to create that living-room intimacy that radio can do so well.

Like the old radio comedian Fred Allen, Keillor writes the material he performs, allowing him to move easily and casually from one routine to the next.

Last night, the material was mostly old, taken largely from his "Prairie Home Companion" radio show which ended in 1987.

The orchestra in particular was chuckling over a routine called "The Music Program at the Second Methodist Church, Ottumwa, Iowa," in which Keillor describes what would happen if several well-known composers were the music directors of that church.

For instance, George Gershwin takes the job briefly, but when he plays the offertory, the congregation feels like ordering a Manhattan on the rocks.

His other major effort was the famous "The Young Lutheran's Guide to Orchestra," a long piece describing each instrument as to its appropriateness for a member of the Lutheran faith.

Along the way were sprinkled several poems and songs, plus a genuine welcome home to the orchestra, playing for the first time since its tour of the Soviet Union and Europe. That's show biz. After playing in the great capital cities of the world, the orchestra winds up in Lake Wobegon, Minn.

But, even Keillor can run out of gas. It was his second of three nights in the Pops program and the centerpiece "News from Lake Wobegon" monologue was pieced together from several old radio shows. Many knew the punch lines, but laughed anyway.

Keillor wraps it up tonight at Heinz Hall at 7:30.