

Why Iowa?

Why not? Keillor says

By Mark Siebert
The Press-Citizen

So many people asked Garrison Keillor "why another *A Prairie Home Companion* farewell performance?" and "why Iowa City?" that he wrote a song about it.

Friday night, at the start of his three hour and 10 minute show at Hancher Auditorium, Keillor urged the audience to sing along.

Why Iowa?

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We could've gone anywhere.

Why Iowa?

Don't ask why he's here. Just go, if you have the chance. If not, another version of Friday night's show airs live at 5 p.m. on KSUI FM 91.7 or KUNI FM 90.9.

Keillor led his group of musicians and singers through a long evening of music, skits and storytelling Friday. It was the same kind of entertainment that made his live radio show a hit with millions.

There were words from the show's fictitious sponsors: Bob's Bank in the green mobile home and Bertha's Kitty Boutique, which was having a 2-for-1 summer sale. Bring in your dog and get two cats in return.

The usually politely subdued Hancher crowd cheered and even hooted a few times at the jokes and music.

The centerpiece of the set was a light-blue frame house with a bay window and porch set back on the stage. But Keillor dominated his surroundings, standing in a suit, red tie, red socks and suspenders, gently rocking back and forth by the microphone stand.

Keillor willingly shared the stage with the other performers, including Iowa City musicians Greg Brown and Dave Moore. The crowd seemed to enjoy the variety of performers and selections, from gospel to instrumental



Press-Citizen/Rodney White

Garrison Keillor plays his cheeks during a rehearsal of his show at Hancher Auditorium.

REVIEW

Ukrainian folk songs.

But the performance seemed to drag as the first half ended, without Keillor to offer his assured, deep voice or his perfectly unpolished singing.

It's a voice that makes everything seem all right in the world — or at least in the Midwest.

Then came the intermission, without the customary beer

and wine offerings. After all, as the sign said, Lake Wobegon is in a dry county.

The second half of the farewell performance was what Keillor fans came to see.

He reminisced about past shows, his 21-year-old son and a trip to an Iowa City poetry reading many years ago.

Then the lights dimmed. He pulled up the stool that had been by his side most of the performance. He sat down and hunched his tall frame over the microphone in his hand.

It was time for news from Lake Wobegon, where, of course, it's been a quiet week.

In Lake Wobegon, a video store just opened in front of Bunson Motors, and there was a traffic accident shortly after suppertime Wednesday, and Eloise became the first woman to run for mayor. And the first woman to win.

Some of it's been told before. But, as Keillor told the crowd, it was so good for 13 years why not do it one more time? Again.