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For Keillor, name of the tune is America

by Jack Weatherly
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Garrison Keillor really likes Memphis. He brought his radio show back to the palatial Orpheum Theater last weekend, less than a year after his first show there.

You can tell he loves a place — he spoofs it, and pays tribute in almost the same familiar breath.

He's made a career of ding that with his mythical Lake Wobegon, Minn., which he also tells us about in magazines and books.

Saturday night, he satirized a number of things he enjoys about the town where I grew up.

He did a sketch of a fictional

wild child who sounds surprisingly like a lot of the pioneers of rock 'n' roll, for which Memphis is renowned.

Then he brought out the real McCoy, his guest star of the night, Carl Perkins, Mr. Blue Suede Shoes.

Perkins, I'm sure you know, helped to hammer out in Sam Phillips' little tunesmith shop, Sun Studios, a new musical alloy.

Keillor serves up a wide variety of music on his American Radio

Company of the Air, which comes Saturdays at 5 p.m.

The name of the tune for all of the music is Americana.

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Such as gospel.

Another musical guest was James Blackwood, a member of the original Blackwood Brothers Quartet. The quartet was a popular gospel group that started in the 1930s.

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white-hot sound that, in the eyes of many, stood to undermine society.

And, of course, gospel music remains to this day a music essentially unchanged, and with a big following.

Keillor calls himself "the lonesome Lutheran." And while it appears he has wandered from his spiritual upbringing, he has what might be called a nostalgia for it.

He joined in with Blackwood and Perkins for a rousing medley of gospel favorites.

Keillor joked that when he was growing up in Minnesota, the Blackwoods' music was "too fast" for his family's liking, though he had an aunt that just adored it.

A personal footnote to all of this.

The Blackwoods apparently turned a nice profit. When I was a high school student, a member of the second generation of Blackwoods dated, and eventually married, a girl who was a student there.

He'd pick her up in his chariot, a white Chevrolet Corvette, as I recall.

Jimmy, I think was his name, and he was envied by the guys in school.

Anyway, back to the show. It strikes me that it is like rock 'n' roll: who would've figured it?

The show is sophisticated but old-fashioned. In an era of trash and flash, it is wholesome and slow.

A two-hour musical variety repertory company relying on wit and imagination is an anachronism nowadays.

It's a real money-maker (for Keillor) on a non-profit network. The fact that it is a commercial success is yet another irony, a little Keillorian joke, no doubt.