

THE FOURTH OF JULY

Celebrating *freely*



SUSAN PFANNMULLER/Special to The Star

The season finale of the radio show "A Prairie Home Companion" was produced Saturday at Starlight Theatre. Host Garrison Keillor brought the sold-out crowd up to date on the happenings at Lake Wobegon.

A 'graceful' KC becomes a Prairie Home Companion

By PHIL O'CONNOR
Staff Writer

Humorist and radio show host Garrison Keillor came to the big city to help put a small-town feel into Kansas City's Fourth of July celebration.

About 8,000 people packed Starlight Theatre in the sweltering heat Saturday evening to see the live season finale of the Keillor's popular public radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion."

Elsewhere, families and friends gathered for food, festivals and fireworks.

Keillor, dressed in a black tuxedo and red bow tie, delighted the audience in the two-hour performance with a folksy mix of music, comedy skits and "The News From Lake Wobegon," a fictitious place "where the women are strong, the men are good-looking and all of the children are above average."

Keillor, 55, began with a song and later gave his own abbreviated history

of the area.

He touched on several Kansas City traditions, including barbecue, the Plaza and even the origins of Starlight and its Moorish-style architecture, which he said was inspired by a visit by Marie of Romania in the 1920s.

"People who think Kansas City is kind of a cow town have not been here, because it's a graceful city, one of the most graceful in America," he said.

He noted the city's parks, boulevards and
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David Thibeau, 3, son of Dan and Cathy Thibeau in rural Platte County, got into waving his flag Saturday at the town's Fourth of July parade. Hundreds turned out to watch and participate in events.

Crowds brave heat, humidity to celebrate nation's birthday

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...vards, statuary and its fountain, which he said must be partly to blame for the city's high humidity. He noted the Plaza and downtown's location on hills as a sharp bend in the Missouri River. He said the area owed a lot to J.C. Nichol for his efforts in developing the graceful tree-lined city. But Kellor impromptu named "Nichols" hometown of Olathe, making it sound more like "Olathe."

"I impromptu named Olathe, Kansas, didn't I?" Kellor said.

"There, at some, people hear from Olathe who think you did, but you got so much the right," said author and Kansas City native, Calvin Trillin. Trillin was a guest on the show, which has as many as 2.5 million listeners each week on 433 public radio stations across the country.

"Doesn't the pronunciation 'Olathe' have a more lyrical sound to it?" Kellor said. "Olathe" sounds good."

"No, I think Olathe is the correct way," Trillin said. "That's what Marie of Romania always said, although with her accent."

Stage commercials cast the classic of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman as modern-day action movies complete with monster trucks, bullets and car chases. Soundtrack: street horns and shouts were the apparel of the day for Sunlight's biggest crowd of the season. Even so, some abandoned their non-drenched seats for the shade along the sides of the parade. Long lines snaked from concession stands.

Kellor at one point told listeners there would be a slight intermission during which the crowd would be cooled down with a fire hose. No such luck.

Parkville

How Marshall knew he was in store for a long day by looking at the stretch of cars in front of him.

"It's going to get a little hectic around here," said Marshall, a Parkville police officer, as he directed traffic along Missouri 9 leading downtown for the city's annual Fourth of July parade. "We get a lot of folks coming in. It gets bigger each year."

Even before the parade began, Parkville Police Chief Bill Hudson was holding someone in custody: his 3-year-old grandson Nick Hen. They rode together in the chief's police car, complete with flashing lights and siren.

"I think he's still in shock from them," Hudson said. "They must've been too loud."

An often overcast sky didn't stop thousands throughout the area, mostly clad in red, white and blue, from attending the parade and the other events Parkville was putting on to celebrate the country's birthday.

Wearing a red dress with white stars and a matching headband, Alexandra Clifton, 3, led her father, William Clifton, through the masses for the right spot from which to view the festivities.

"We come every year and she knows exactly where to go," William Clifton said. "Afterward, she'll want to ride the horses at the carnival across the street. She wants me out."

Sitting on a hillside, Deb Dickerson of Kansas City said she became a spectator by accident. She originally drove her son, Billy, 10, to his piano lesson nearby, saw the activity and decided to stop.

Standing among a group of foreign war veterans who initiated a float honoring veterans who died in the country's national war, Ben Cain of Parkville said the day should also be remembered for everyone who made a sacrifice for their country.

"We cannot forget those who

paid our price for our freedom," he said.

Jackson County

Festivities got off to an insurance start at Missouri Town 1855 and Fort Osage, where staff and volunteers in costume portrayed Independence Days from the past.

The day started with thunder-showers, driving visitors into log cabins and other frontier buildings at Evening Park.

People stood in knots under umbrellas, watching soaked chickens shake like wet dogs. Women tended fires in the rain, boiling sweet corn

Friday Family Funnies

ROKBO

FOUR DECADES OF MUSIC

JULY 10 Stay out to your Mom would of whole the music of the 50's. The Krav Kat things off at 5 p.m., followed by The Platters at 6 p.m. with "Only You", "The Great Pretender" and other hits from the bubbly sock era. While you're here, check out the big fun on our 19 classic cars.

JULY 24 Get a under dose of Friday Night Fever with The Kansas City Brass & Electric Band at 5 p.m. Then at 8 p.m., the Beach Boasting Ray Sawyer with a 1970s clad with "Come of the Rolling Stone" and "I Wanna Be Your Man".

DR. HOOK

THE BEACH BOASTING RAY SAWYER

FRIDAY FAMILY FUNNIES • 5 - 9:30 PM •