

COMING SOON TO A THEATRE NEAR YOU ...



DEREK PRITT / THE MONTANA STANDARD

PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION'S Garrison Keillor sings "Springtime in the Rockies" with The Guys' All-Star Shoe Band during rehearsals Friday afternoon at the Mother Lode Theatre in Butte.

Preparing for 'Prairie'

■ **Butte hit the mother lode in landing National Public Radio's 'A Prairie Home Companion.' Friday, the work began in earnest.**

BY KATE KOMPAS
of *The Montana Standard*

As a five-member crew was busily preparing Friday afternoon for his Saturday performances, radio personality Garrison Keillor was in Butte — but he was still writing his script.

Keillor, the host of National Public Radio staple "A Prairie Home Companion," is performing two sold-out shows at the Mother Lode Theater. The performances, which will be held at 3:45 and 7:30 p.m., will feature musical and comedy skits, as well as

Keillor's renowned storytelling.

The show will turn the spotlight on special guests, including singer Stephanie Davis and her band, cowboy poet Paul Zarzyski and pianist Rich Dworsky and The Guys' All-Star Shoe Band. Actors Tim Russell and Sue Scott also will perform.

Keillor wasn't available for interviews Friday, but crew members spoke for him.

Tiffany Hanssen, marketing director for "Prairie," said even though Keillor was still penning his material for his

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Who needs tickets?

While the live performance of "A Prairie Home Companion" from the Mother Lode Theatre today is sold out, people can listen to the show on the radio.

It broadcasts at 6 p.m. on KUFM 91.3 FM in Butte and 91.7 FM in Dillon. Some Anaconda and Deer Lodge Valley residents can also pick up the station on 89.1 FM Missoula.

Whitehall and the Jefferson and Madison Valley residents can tune in at 4 p.m. on KBMC 102.1 FM from Bozeman.

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Prairie ...

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Butte audience, he's a big fan of the West and will likely make time to do some investigating.

"He loves touring and going out and exploring the local flavor," Hanssen said. "He'll come in and wander around; he loves traveling to different cities, and he loves being out West."

Traveling to different cities is exactly what Keillor has been doing for the past several months. His crew started its tour in October out of the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul, Minn. Butte is the first stop on Keillor's spring tour. Next week, he'll broadcast from Greeley, Colo.

As Keillor worked on his monologue Friday afternoon, "Prairie" staff was transforming the Mother Lode Theatre into the ideal setting for Keillor's homespun humor.

Scott Rivard, technical director for the show, seemed confident that the Mother Lode can function as the quintessential environment for "Prairie."

"Garrison likes intimate contact with the audience," he said. "The theater is beautiful. It's a great asset for Butte."

It can take quite some time to create the ideal "intimate" atmosphere. Sam Hudson, the sound engineer, arrived at the theater promptly at 8 a.m.

Even though he said the sound was ready by late Friday afternoon, Hudson said it still will need "constant adjustments."

Constant adjustments are understandable, considering Hudson is working with almost 40 microchannels, eight monitor mixes and three or four different sound zones.

However, Hudson said despite these intricacies, everything had been running smoothly.

"Yeah, technically it's

demanding, but it's also fun," he said. "It's going flawless today."

Crew member Alan Frechtman also was an early riser. The assistant stage and lighting director started setting up at 8 a.m.

"The challenge is doing lighting for radio," he said. "How many people understand that? I mean, they think lighting for radio is the green light that comes on when they turn the dial. There's more to it than that — it's making the stage appealing to look at."

Frechtman said although with about 100 lights, it "isn't a rock 'n' roll show" and it still is taxing to create the perfect mood for Keillor's performance.

"Each theater is like a different person. There's complexities, and what works for some doesn't work for others," he said. "The Mother Lode is a small, quaint theater. I like it. It has history as opposed to one built in the '70s."

Frechtman also said the crew appreciates the effect Keillor has had on his fans.

"With touring, you get a sense of how big the show is," he said. "People are coming from all around, not just from Butte. People are driving hours and hours to see him."

Hanssen called Keillor's rapport with his audience, as well as his storytelling, "a gift."

"His voice, his demeanor, his personality," she said, "his monologues and his skits, they're little nuggets that everybody can relate to. He can really talk about the human condition."

For Frechtman, this contact is an important part of touring.

"We (the crew) don't get out to see the town, but we get to meet the people," he said. "For us, that's our world."

Both shows are sold out, but some cancellation tickets will be available for sale after 1:45 p.m. today at the Mother Lode Theatre box office.

Tickets ...

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During the live performance, the show will be heard on more than 460 stations nationwide and worldwide on the Astra Satellite Network and the Armed Forces Network.

Cancellation tickets to both performances in Butte will be available for sale after 1:45 p.m. today at the Mother Lode box office, 316 W. Park St.

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