

Keillor brings his Minnesota humor to Reno

'A Prairie Home Companion':
Thousands flock to see voice behind popular radio variety show.

By Patti Steele
RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

"Coming to you live from the Sierra Nevada mountains from this big basketball arena ... live from Reno, Nevada."

With those words, Garrison Keillor introduced Reno and the Lawlor Events Center to more than 2 million faithful

listeners of "A Prairie Home Companion" Saturday, as the popular down-home radio variety show was broadcast live from Nevada for the first time.

The show started at 3 p.m. so listeners in the East and Central time zones could get their weekly fix of gossip from Lake Wobegon, Minn. — live and on time.

More than 5,600 people streamed into the Lawlor Events Center to get a look at the man behind that familiar voice and to see firsthand a live radio broadcast.

Keillor had this crowd in his pocket before he walked on stage just minutes before the show went live. He made everybody feel at home by leading the audience in singing "Home on the Range."

"I wanted to make sure you're the right audience," he told them, then asking if the show usually aired live at 3

REBROADCAST

What: "A Prairie Home Companion."
When: Noon-2 p.m. today.
Where: KUNR-88.7 FM.

p.m. locally.

"No," boomed the response. "Well, what do you people usually do at 3 in the afternoon — yard work?" he asked.

For those who didn't know, Keillor told them this show would be live.

"It goes out as we do it," he

said. "We're too lazy to edit."

Then the lights went down and the folks went along for the ride — two hours of singing, music, comedy skits and Keillor's own brand of storytelling.

What appeared effortless had been preceded by several hours of rehearsal. Before he put on the suit, Keillor looked more comfortable in casual clothes working on the numbers he sometimes writes just hours before show time.

He and the show's regulars

See **KEILLOR** on **13A**



Jeff Cooper/Reno Gazette-Journal

SINGING STORY-TELLER: Garrison Keillor's unique show in Reno.

Keillor

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—actors Tim Russell and Sue Scott, special-effects man Tom Keith and Richard Dworsky, The Guy's All-Star Shoe Band leader — were rehearsing until less than an hour before the doors opened.

After each number, Keillor offered direction.

"The key to the joke here is the talk about the food fights," he told Russell and Scott. "Throwing food as if it's something almost erotic."

Or this: "Candy sounds a little more Southern in the beginning; I'd keep her there, but don't rush her lines."

As he always does on the road, Keillor customized the show to fit the host city. Saturday's routines included plenty of references to Reno, cowboys and local culture, which the audience applauded without prompting.

"Lake Tahoe is about 45 minutes away from here, depending on how many people want to go there the same time you do. Nevada—a place to do things that are illegal elsewhere in America, which seems to be the function of Nevada. Everybody needs a place to do things and see things that you would not do in your own hometown."

The crowd even forgave Keillor for occasionally rhyming Nevada with terra cotta, during one of the

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many limericks he recited. "We're big fans of Prairie Home Companion," said Carol Schley of Reno, who attended with husband, Bill. "I'm from Minnesota, so to me this is like hearing about back home."

Elbert Mills of Fallon liked the show "because it's got my kind of humor. I wanted to see how they did this live."

During the five-minute intermission at the top of the hour, many gathered around the stage to hand Keillor items to autograph.

"He is such a doll," said Marti Rhodes of Reno. "They sound just like they do on the radio. I wanted to close my eyes and pretend I was at home listening, but it's too much fun to actually watch them."

One of the more popular segments of the show involves Keillor reading notes audience members scribble and stuff into boxes before they take their seats. Most are greetings to friends who listen to the show and only a few are chosen to be read on air.

Among the notes from Reno that missed getting on the air:



Jeff Cooper/Reno Gazette-Journal

RADIO SHOW: Garrison Keillor, right, Sue Scott, Companion' Saturday at the Lawlor Events Center on the University of Nevada, Reno campus.

"Happy birthday, Nancy. Your mom won't be here; she took the wrong bus from North Dakota."

"To all the relatives in Wisconsin — we're back in Reno again. The last time to get married, this time to

get divorced. Mary and Martin."

"Our son Ryan turns 18 today. He wanted to be an astronaut, but now he wants to be a Lutheran pastor — what's the difference? Chuck and Pam"

"Hello, John and Eunice. Greetings from the place where the right arm grows stronger, the wallet gets lighter and the debts grow cheaper. We'll be home sooner than planned, Jan and Roger."