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Radio companion Garrison Keillor treats Miami to his gentle humor

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Garrison Keillor brought his weekly public radio show *A Prairie Home Companion* from its mythical digs of Lake Wobegone to the Bayfront Park Amphitheatre in Miami on Saturday. And, as he does when he performs in cities outside his home base at the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul, Minn., Keillor provided a portrait of Miami that was alternately flattering and satirical.

Dressed in a long-sleeved white shirt and a camel-colored jacket that were more suited to a less humid setting, the lanky Keillor said in that comforting languorous voice of his that Miami was "a beautiful place to do a show" and promised "two hours among the flowers here beneath the whispering palms."

The Miami Chamber of Commerce couldn't have scripted it any better for a national radio audience that was bundled under sub-freezing temperatures this weekend. But, as Keillor pointed out during a skit about Mr. Rogers' new neighborhood in the great beyond, "comedy is caricature" and few cities in America lend themselves to caricature quite like Miami.

He joked that the elderly moved so slowly here that they "looked like sculptures" and that some day there will be a statue of Fidel Castro because "what would the city be without him." Keillor also described Miami as "a city where Spanish is spoken ... and English if you really need to."

The weekly episode of Keillor as *Guy Noir*, *Private Eye* chronicled a Minnesota dairy farmer who jumps a cruise ship to become a knife thrower in the circus. The gumshoe's footpath takes him to Miami's "Little Oslo," where he eats a herring enchilada, finds a Cuban Lutheran church and

learns that "people are more soulful here — they cry."

Keillor said more seriously that Miami is the poorest city in America, with the lowest per capita income. Then he circled back to the joke when he observed, "People [here] sleep in the afternoon and go out until 3, 4, 5 in the morning. Back home, if you can't get drunk by 10, we can't wait around for you."

While there was plenty of spoken material, including the trademark essay about life in Lake Wobegone, this *Prairie Home* show was as much about the music as the skits (which included sound effects man Fred Newman, impressionist Tim Russell and actress Sue Scott). In fact, aside from signage of the show's "sponsors" — the American Duct Tape Council and the Ketchup Advisory Board, among others — the Bayfront Amphitheatre stage was set up more for a concert than a variety show.

Prairie's foot-tapping Shoe Band was spread across one half of the stage with guest artist Donato Poveda on the other. Keillor introduced the Cuban-born, Miami-bred Poveda by saying modestly, "We've served as the warm-up act to Donato Poveda," before the acoustic guitarist and his band played a dance number and a ballad.

Both were in Spanish, which was clearly not the first language for the 10,000 or so in attendance, or the more than 4 million radio listeners. But if a musician could sell the virtues of a place in a foreign tongue, it was the soulful Poveda, whose ballad included a line that translates to "Give me a kiss from that mouth, give me a kiss that'll make me cry."

Keillor proved to be a lovely singer in his own right with an aching song about the recent fire in a Rhode Island nightclub that killed 98 people. A new father at age 60, Keillor mourned "the beautiful daughters and passionate sons" who were victimized by a downward sliding rock band that was too vain to know a fire hazard when they saw one.

Saturday's show was the first in Miami for *Prairie Home* since 1997. Between Keillor's wise and gentle humor, and the broad-ranging soundtrack, the hope is that this engaging two hours of live radio will be back again soon. In the meantime, Miami will undoubtedly create plenty of fresh comedy material.



TWO HOURS AMONG THE FLOWERS:
Performing Saturday at the Bayfront Park Amphitheatre, Garrison Keillor of mythical Lake Wobegone said Miami was "a beautiful place to do a show."
Photo/Javier R. Franceschi