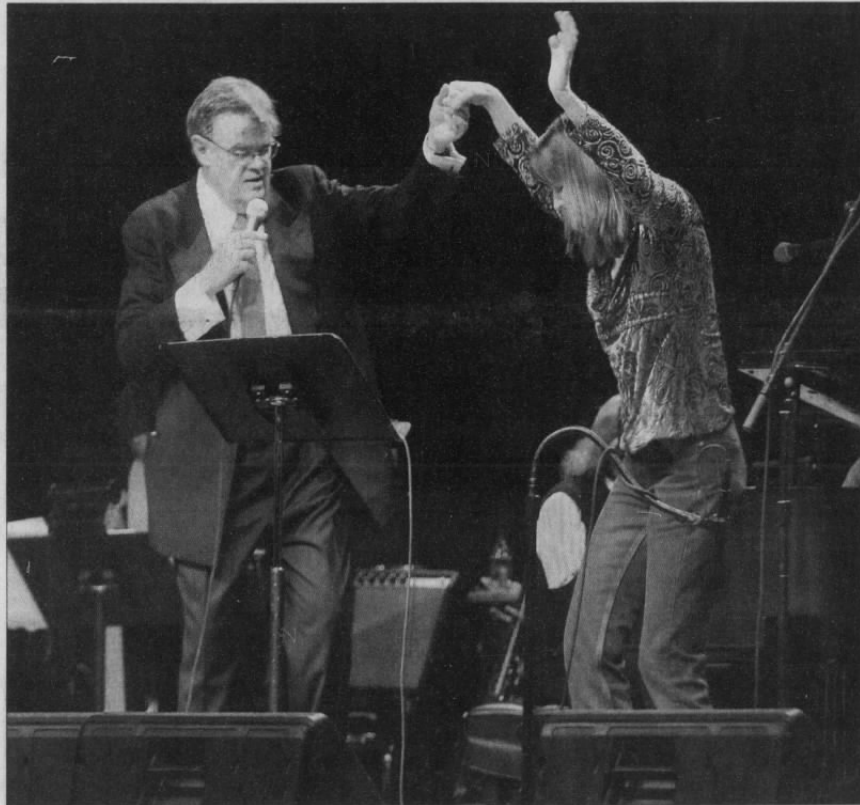




"A Prairie Home Companion" is heard by more than 4 million listeners.

# 'Home' at last

## Garrison Keillor plays to sold-out house



Garrison Keillor, host of National Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," dances on stage Saturday afternoon with Billings singer/songwriter Stephanie Davis during a live broadcast of his show from Adams Center in Missoula.

Long-awaited, popular NPR radio show gets rave reviews

Written by PERRY BACKUS  
Photographed by KURT WILSON  
of the Missoulian

It's nowhere near noon and Hamilton's Beverly Zeller is filled with hope. Sitting in the warmth of a perfect Indian summer fall day, Zeller's the

first in line for any spare tickets for the Saturday afternoon performance of master storyteller and humorist Garrison Keillor at the University of Montana's Adams Center. The first of nearly 4,800 tickets sold out weeks ago in a matter of five hours.

"Somehow I missed it," Zeller said. "I tried calling on the phone to

see if there might be more. ... I was told the only way to know for sure is be here at noon when the box office opens. I've been listening to Garrison since 1977 and I don't want to miss this.

"So here I am - number one in

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Before the live show begins, Keillor joins the sold-out audience for the singing of 'America the Beautiful.'

## Home

Continued

line," she said, beaming. Inside, crews are just finishing setting up a new batch of chairs in the back of the room. By showtime, they figure there will be close to 5,000 packed to rafters and ready for a two-hour-long treat into old-time radio. Zeller and others milling about outside are going home happy this day.

On stage, against a backdrop of a two-story, old-fashioned home and a smattering of advertisements for fictional products like duct tape, powdered milk biscuits and Guy's shoes, Keillor and crew are busy rehearsing and making a few last-minute changes. Sound effects man Fred Newman works on perfecting the noise of a cocking shotgun — "it needs to be two-step, a more ratcheting sound," Keillor urges. Sue Scott needs to make her character "a little younger, a little more naïve."

Just a bit more than an hour later, Donna Warren and Margie Nagle are stepping out on their way down Sixth Street — if they were any more excited, they'd be skipping.

"I've been e-mailing everybody this morning telling them the day has finally arrived," Warren said, grinning. "It's finally here."

Warren can remember the very evening when she first listened to Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion." "It was in



Keillor, dressed in his trademark red tie, red socks and red shoes, delivers the news from Lake Wobegon on Saturday afternoon.

the mid-1980s and she was living in rural Tennessee.

"I had a fire in the fireplace and oil lamps burning in the background," she said. "And then 'Prairie Home Companion' came on the radio. It was like I was back in the '40s."

It seems like many fans of the show remember just about when they first tuned in.

Gus Edlund was in Denver for a University of Minnesota alumni meeting. It was 1977 and he was driving to a hockey game when Keillor's show came on the air. He's been a fan ever since — enough so to drive his motor home to town to attend the Saturday show.

Bill Macgregor of Butte was teaching at the University of Hawaii when he first heard the program. He continued to tune

in after moving to Butte to teach at Montana Tech in 1984. Today, sitting about half way to the rafters in the Adams Center, he's wearing the shirt commemorating Keillor's last visit to Montana at Butte in 1999.

"It was a pretty amazing show," he said. "I was just flabbergasted at how much local color there was. ... I think people tune in to his show because they like to hear about Middle America. I don't think you'd find that this is a blue crowd or a red crowd. I think it would be profoundly purple."

Just then, Keillor walks onto the stage dressed in a black suit and a famously loud red tie with shoes and socks to match. A moment later, Macgregor is standing with every other soul in the place and proudly singing the "Star Spangled Banner" under the direction of the flamboyant Keillor.

Before long, Keillor is greeting some surprised fans

entering the arena with a handshake and smile as the crowd sings a rendition of "America the Beautiful." Before the afternoon is over, folks had the chance to stretch their vocal chords to a few Rolling Stones tunes as well.

"I tip my hat to men my age out doing rock and roll," Keillor said.

The afternoon's filled with a glimpse back into a simpler time — before reality TV or large screens filled with exploding parts. The music of Montana's own Stephanie Davis and a trio from Bozeman and Victor,

Idaho, called Growing Old Men entertains a crowd entranced watching performances accomplished in the simple-direct fashion of old-time radio brought to Missoula by America Public Media and Montana Public Radio.

And now, people all over the world have an idea of what the town's all about.

"Missoula — it's Montana, but it has feng shui and herbal tea," Keillor said.

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