



Humorist and "A Prairie Home Companion" host Garrison Keillor performs his one-man show Wednesday for a sold-out Midland Theatre in Newark. (Eric George, *The Advocate*)

FOR ONE NIGHT, KEILLOR BECOMES

County's companion

Comedic yarn-spinner captivates Midland Theatre audience

By ABBEY ROY
Advocate Reporter

NEWARK — Garrison Keillor likely could have entertained an audience for hours with the pleasantly distinct, velvety voice that every kid wishes his dad would sound like, come time for a bedtime story.

But two hours that culminated in Aunt Evelyn's ashes being carried away by her lover, Raul, who was wearing a coat made from the skins of a hundred rainbow trout, as Evelyn's grandson and 24 tipsy Lutheran pastors watched, was enough to keep The Midland Theatre rolling with laughter even as they filed out into the night.

Keillor, an author and radio broadcaster known for his "A Prairie Home Companion" radio series featuring sketches from Keillor's fictional hometown of Lake Wobegon, Minn., brought a lively bit of Wobegon flavor to Newark on Wednesday in the sold-out appearance.

Although the show was solely Keillor, his well-loved red tennis shoes and a barstool — no special

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— Garrison Keillor

guests or broadcasts — Keillor drew from Wobegon and his own history to keep the audience smiling.

The tales started out realistically enough with Keillor's account of Tuesday's inauguration of President Obama, which he attended and praised.

Obama's message of hope evolved into Bible-reading, then to cold Minnesota winters, when Keillor said he and his siblings retreated to the "little cotton envelopes of our beds," foregoing showers because the cold was simply too excruciating.

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Keillor

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"My father believed if you could not see your breath when you talked, you were wasting fuel," he explained.

It got better, however, in the morning when the children would awaken to hot cereal, prayer time with their "dark Lutheran" parents and, finally, catch a sleigh down the frozen Mississippi River to school in the bowels of a torch-lit underground cave.

Keillor related all of this in a subdued yet alluring tone, rarely cracking a smile at scenarios that required him to pause as the audience collected itself.

Through vivid character descriptions he seemed to be envisioning as he leaned back in his stool, eyes closed, Keillor introduced players such as Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Jack, whose last words were spoken as he gripped a parking meter downtown and argued with a man called Mr. Bergey.

That's not to mention Cousin Kate, who, according to the story, managed to pin Keillor down pantsless in the boys' restroom while she hid from an administrator who was mad at her for a suggestive talent show performance.

Or Debbie, who had planned to get married on a pontoon boat

on Lake Wobegon, with Starflower Moonbright as the officiant, until Debbie invited her ex-lover to participate in the ceremony by flying in on a hot-air balloon.

Somehow, each character was seamlessly woven into a plot that culminated in increasingly lengthy stretches of laughter by the audience.

Whatever did happen to Aunt Evelyn's ashes inside the bowling ball?

Well, it's likely that only Raul knows.

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