

THE LAST LAUGHS



BOB ZELLAR/Gazette Staff

Garrison Keillor opened his sold-out show at the Alberta Bair Theater on Wednesday with a short concert of songs.

Garrison Keillor performs bucket list show for Billings fans

By JACI WEBB
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Humorist Garrison Keillor kept the advice and observations flowing, all set to his signature Midwestern cadence Wednesday night at the Alberta Bair Theater.

The show sold out weeks ago, and for some members of the audience it was a

bucket list event, to see Keillor before he retires in July from "A Prairie Home Companion."

Cam Browne and her husband, Jim, sat in the fourth row, enjoying the close seats because Cam bought them 15 minutes after they went on sale in July.

"We both grew up in Minnesota. The town I grew up in Good Thunder, a town of about 700 people that was just like

Lake Wobegon," Cam said. "My husband is 100 percent Norwegian, and I'm 100 percent German. It's perfect."

But you don't have to be Lutheran, Norwegian or a Midwesterner to get his humor. The stories have an everyman quality to them, from Keillor's story about his first cigarette to having his

Please see Keillor, A8



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Garrison Keillor sings for the crowd Wednesday at the start of his sold-out show at the Alberta Bair Theater in Billings.

Keillor

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wisdom tooth pulled.

A bus load of fans came from Lewistown to see the show. Andrea and Bob Holmen drove over from Red Lodge for their second Keillor show.

"I just think he's a hoot," Andrea said. "I've been listening to his radio show for the last 10 or 12 years."

Keillor started the show with a singalong. The audience was a tad shy at first, but they warmed to the idea of singing a cappella along with Keillor.

Keillor started out with patriotic songs like "My Country Tis of Thee" a couple of church songs, then rock, including the Beatles' "I Saw her Standing There."

"We need more basses," Keillor announced, and sure enough, you could hear more men's voices harmonizing with their wives.

Keillor sprinkled his 95-minute set with songs and poems, some a tad naughty, but most just funny.

He talked about grow-

ing old, but it seems that Keillor never grew up. He still views the world with a child-like wonder and the power of Keillor's stories is that he captures all those important details that some of us may have forgotten because we grew up.

Keillor said he still yearns for solitude, which he finds in an old fishing shack out on Lake Wobegon, or driving from Missoula to Billings looking at the brown hills that made him think of Lent. Complaining that he doesn't get a word in edgewise at home with "Nanook of the North," Keillor said, "I need to go off to Montana every so often for freedom of speech."

Later he expanded the joke to add, "If you can't be free to speak freely in Montana, why go?"

Keillor complained about bad books where the author writes about having to leave the U.S. to find the meaning of life and about bad advice he got as a kid: "We were told we would not have a satisfying life if we couldn't multiply fractions."

But mostly Keillor reminded us how good it feels to laugh at ourselves and our lives.