

Garrison Keillor mellows out 2,400 fans

By Dennis Mullins
Entertainment writer

Review

Contrary to popular opinion, Will Rogers Sr. is alive and well — and living in the body of Garrison Keillor.

Keillor, chief instigator and perpetrator of the popular radio program, "A Prairie Home Companion," brought his down-home humor and mellow mannerisms to 2,400 cheering fans Tuesday night at the Oscar Mayer Theater.

The effort kicked off WHA-AM's fund-raising drive and helped celebrate their 65th anniversary.

Keillor at first rejected WHA's

claim that it is the nation's oldest public radio station, but set the record straight when he revealed, "WHA celebrated their 50th in 1969. They're getting older faster. But that's fine. I'm for anything that works."

Started on Minnesota public radio eight years ago, "A Prairie Home Companion" is a variety show performed before an audience. Having gone national in 1980, the program is heard every Saturday (5 to 7 p.m. on WHA-AM and WERN-FM) on 200 sta-

tions in 44 states.

The idea came from Keillor and some friends who wanted to have fun on Saturday afternoons. They decided to keep the show a secret, though, not to tell anybody, not to publicize, not even to use their real names. They didn't want the show to become successful, because "as everyone knows, success breeds corruption," philosophized the man-of-the-hour Tuesday night.

Keillor then looked at the full house and gently quipped, "Somebody told."

Wedge between the Butch Thompson Trio's honky-tonk jazz, Peter Ostroushko's fiddle playing and the bluegrass sounds of Stoney Lane-some, Keillor talked of his home town, Lake Wobegon, Minnesota.

"It's a little town that time forgot but decades can't improve . . . Where the women are strong, the men are good looking and the children are about average," continued Keillor.

Local sponsors include Powder-

milk Biscuits ("They're wholesome and expeditious"), Ralph's Pretty-Good Grocery ("If you can't find it at Ralph's, you can probably do without it"), Chatterbox Caffe ("Where your lime jello is always topped with mayonnaise") and Organs by Barton ("Theater organs for your home").

In Lake Wobegon news, Father Emil, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility, completed the annual Feast of St. Francis rituals with the blessing of the animals — all of which he is allergic to.

The populace, though, was stirred by the arrival of Brother Bob and Sister Verna, preaching hell and damnation to local Lutherans. Delighted by their appearance, Father Emil attributes all their yelling and screaming to a clear-cut case of "theological inferiority."

Looking more like a minister before his congregation, and possessing

a voice that could soothe raging dragons, Keillor humorously continued on the woes of Wobegon. Should you have missed this refreshing two-hour celebration of music and insight, WHA-AM and WERN will broadcast Tuesday's show this Saturday at the conclusion of the regular installment of "A Prairie Home Companion."

Showcase

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