

THEATER REVIEWS

Keillor brings 'Prairie Home' to full house at Whitney Hall

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You can't go home again ...
Wrong.

More than 2 million people go home every week, through the magic of radio, to "the little town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve."

The little town is, of course, Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, that wondrous spot created by Garrison Keillor on "A Prairie Home Companion."

A capacity audience in Whitney Hall of the Kentucky Center for the Arts was swept up in Keillor's spell last night. He has a magic way with words.

When he described the shy person's reaction to encounters with strangers, his discomfort was enough to make the heart ache. His remembrances of twice-a-year revival meetings at the Church of the Sanctified Brethren, complete with hell-fire sermons and 16 choruses of "Almost Persuaded," struck many a responsive chord.

No pictures are needed; his descriptions conjure up a small town any of us could have grown up in. He spun such a vivid picture of an early-morning fishing trip that one could almost see fog on the stage.

While the high point of each show is Keillor's monologue, he can be

counted on to join the band for one or more songs. Last night, he joined special guest Chet Atkins on "Nobody's Darlin' on Earth," described as "a typical old-time traditional song of death and desolation."

Sometimes the songs get woven into the narrations. A description of Bob and Karen's trip to Spain was sung to the "Habanera" from "Carmen." "Cat, You Better Come on Home" was a hilarious patter song in the segment of the show sponsored by Bertha's Kitty Boutique. (Bertha has a new product this summer, "Il gato gelato" frozen ices.)

Atkins soloed on a medley of "In the Good Old Summertime," "Bye Bye Blues" and "Tiger Rag." He was joined by fiddler Johnny Gimble for "Fiddlin' Around." Gimble later demonstrated his versatility by playing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in four-part harmony with the bow hair loose and the bow upside down.

It's that kind of show — a little bit of everything, blended into a marvelous "tasty and expeditious" stew. Pianist Butch Thompson and fid-

dle and mandolin player Peter Ostroushko, regulars on the show, provided great music throughout. Ostroushko's "The B.T. Polka" showed off his fiddle style, and Thompson did a super ragtime middle section. Guitarist Greg Brown, singing "Goin' Down to Brownsville" complete with some old-time yodeling, brought back memories of radio shows from the days before television.

Keillor joined in on a real tear-jerker, "Brand New Angel With an Old Violin," but the musical topper of the evening was Keillor's own "Hymn to Lake Wobegon," sung to the "Going Home" theme from the "New World Symphony."

The success of "A Prairie Home Companion" can't quite be explained, though many have tried. (When you tell your friends about it, they tend to look at you a bit strangely.) Like Powdermilk biscuits, it just has to be tasted.

A live broadcast performance will originate from Whitney Hall tonight at 6. The show is sold out, but speakers will be set up on the Back Terrace/Belvedere. The broadcast may be heard on station WFPL-FM.