

Small-town life, Hawaii come together in 'Prairie'

By Thomas Kaser
Advertiser Staff Writer

Virtually every expatriate midwesterner in Hawaii, or so it seemed, gathered at the Blaisdell Center Concert Hall yesterday afternoon for an ethnic celebration of sorts.

Actually it was a double ethnic celebration — of small-town America and its decent, guilt-prone and sometimes hapless people, and of Hawaii and its music.

The occasion was the first Hawaii broadcast of the live network radio show "A Prairie Home Companion," hosted by storyteller-extraordinaire Garrison Keillor and beamed by satellite to millions of Americans and Australians by the American Public Radio network.

From all indications yesterday, and at a longer but non-broadcast version held at the Blaisdell Concert Hall Friday night, the program has just as much of a cult following in Hawaii as it does on the Mainland. The attention and response at both performances was rapt.

Keillor, 43, used to affect a Mark Twain-like appearance by wearing a white suit at each broadcast. But lately he has been wearing a tuxedo with tails, black tie, black sneakers, red suspenders and red socks, and he wore that yesterday — with an aloha shirt.

Moments before air time he feigned perplexity and demanded a few minutes' delay because his script papers seemed to be out of order.

But it was precisely 1 p.m. when the red "ON AIR" sign at the side of the stage lit up, and house-band member Peter Ostroushko began strumming the show's musical intro on his mandolin.

Then the band and Keillor launched into their opening theme, the old Hank Snow tune, "Hello Love." But this time Keillor had some Hawaii lyrics: "Well look who's comin', across the sand/I believe it's a Hawaiian band/hello love."

As Keillor had promised in a Friday press conference, yesterday's broadcast featured more music and less of Keillor than what normally originates from the World Theatre, the show's home in St. Paul, Minn.

In fact there was an abundance of Hawaiian music, and Keillor and the members of his house band seemed to enjoy it as much as the audience did.

Eddie Kamae and the Sons of Hawaii did several numbers, as did the Kahaalana Serenaders of Niihau, jazz-blues singer (and part-time Maui resident) Taj Mahal, and the 68-member Kamehameha Schools Glee Club, which sang "America the Beautiful" in Hawaiian and in English, with the audience joining in.

But the show had its moments of high humor, small-town style. Keillor and the band did their snappy musical commercial for Powdermilk Biscuits. ("Well has your family tried 'em, Powdermilk," sings Keillor. "POWDER-MILK!" rejoins the audience in full-shout.)

And there was a message from Minnesota Language Systems, with its study guides to help Hawaii residents who this winter might be planning to visit Minnesota, "the land of 10,000 frozen lakes."

Speaking for Minnesota Language Systems, Ostroushko said the "Minnesota hug" is accomplished by the hugger extending his or her index finger at arm's length and briefly touching the shoulder of the huggee.

Just after intermission, Keillor announced to the radio audience that the show was coming from "Waikiki Beach"

The Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser Honolulu, November 17, 1985 A-7



Advertiser photo by Gregory Yamamoto

With a Powdermilk Biscuits banner overhead, cast members of "A Prairie Home Companion" performed at the Blaisdell Concert Hall Friday night and yesterday afternoon.

— the destination of Buddy the female cow, who is swimming to Hawaii after escaping from a farm in Minnesota and momentarily confusing the Sacramento River for the Pacific Ocean.

The high point, as usual, was Keillor's 20-minute monologue, which came a little later in the show than usual, following three strutting numbers by the Kamehameha Schools Glee Club.

The monologue focused on residents of mythical Lake Wobegon, Minn., who are more than a little resentful and bitter of Keillor flying off to Hawaii while they have to stay in the chilly Midwest.

Not that they haven't tried to come to Hawaii. Hjalmar and Virginia Ingqvist and their grandson Stanley once began a trip to Hawaii, Keillor said, but Hjalmar drank too much pink champagne and made a fool of himself on the flight to Los Angeles. And the trip ended when Stanley accidentally fell down some stairs at the Los Angeles airport, breaking his leg.

Tolleruds, a farm couple who postponed a Hawaii trip about eight years ago so they could use the money to buy some feeder pigs.

A few months later, in the dead of winter, all the pigs died, and the Tolleruds' trip to Hawaii "was lying frozen in the barnyard with their legs sticking up in the air."

But the people back in the Midwest are not just to be laughed at, Keillor said, his left hand clutching the floor-mike stand and his right hand fidgeting with a click-top pen.

"They're sweet people, good people. They realize God loves them. And when you realize God loves you, every place is paradise."