

Keillor delights crowd at Jackson show

■ The live broadcast is heard nationwide.

By Leslie R. Myers
Clarion-Ledger Staff Writer

A *Prairie Home Companion* found a clear channel to its Mississippi fans in a live broadcast Saturday from downtown Jackson.

Comedy, music and the trademark tales of host Garrison Keillor drew enthusiasm in 2,430-seat Thalia Mara Hall. The crowd filled the house — then brought it down as the two-hour live show concluded.

National radio's homespun hit toured here from St. Paul, Minn., in its 20th anniversary celebration. Saturday's show was heard on more than 300 public radio stations nationwide.

In its mythical rural Minnesota manner, *Prairie Home* harkens back to simpler times. Keillor and crew blend humorous skits, fictitious

sponsors and Keillor's monologue, News from Lake Wobegon.

"I've had his Lake Wobegon tapes for years," said Modena Martin of Jackson. "But I never imagined there would be such a receptive audience here — such a fantastic audience."

After curtain fall, audience members mentioned a lot of their favorite things about the show — Keillor, Mississippi tales, excerpts from Jackson writer Eudora Welty's books, sound effects by Tom Keith, mentions of Tupelo's Elvis and Meridian's Jimmie Rodgers, an appearance by WSLI radio's Farmer Jim Neal, and performances by Lexington blues master Lonnie Pitchford and St. Louis R&B/gospel singer Fontella Bass.

"I've been listening to it for 10 years. I love it. It was great entertainment," said Tom Bordeaux, 69, of Meridian. "He (Keillor) has tremen-

dous respect for being a very intelligent and creative man — and he certainly didn't damage that today."

Lesley Silver, 52, of Vicksburg said, "I loved the way Garrison Keillor used no notes and just walked back and forth" during his monologue. "He seemed to be in his own world."

But Keillor's in-the-flesh appearance didn't solve all of radio's mysteries. Crowd members remarked how oddly short he looked from the upper balcony — and how towering he looked from the front rows.

According to spectators, his views of Mississippi were comic and interesting. But a few took issue with Keillor's mention of the Civil War's Southern Cause and rednecks.

"I thought the South that Garrison Keillor saw mostly came from his imagination," said Daniel Boone, 43, of Vicksburg. "But I enjoyed it, anyway."



Brian Albert Broom/The Clarion-Ledger
Garrison Keillor jokingly reacts to sound effects Saturday during a rehearsal in Jackson.

Adam Hammack, 13, of the Johns community, has listened to the show since he was 5. "I like Keillor mostly — and the sound effects guy."