

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Keillor Weds Folk Humor, Classical Music

MUSIC REVIEW

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When Garrison Keillor enumerated the "four pleasures in life" in his Hollywood Bowl Orchestra debut concert on Sunday, he forgot No. 5: the pleasure of sitting under the stars on a cool summer night, listening to live music and Keillor himself.

In a program of satire, tall tales, poetry and uncloying nostalgia, for a receptive audience packed to the nosebleed seats (official attendance: 14,593), Keillor balanced hilarity and pointed observations of

the human experience with a bit-tersweet regret for lost love and lost youth. The Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, conducted by longtime Keillor collaborator Philip Brunelle, matched the mood with flair and sensitivity.

Observations of aging rock stars who "no longer have the capability to outrage people" and depressed Holsteins watching their productivity charts knowing that "re-training will not be an option," figured into the mix.

So did Lake Wobegon denizens, Minnesotans in general, hymns and Biblical references, Irving Thalberg and early Hollywood. It's always a kick to see just how Keillor, who has raised the shaggy

dog story to the level of true art, wends his circuitous way back to his tale's point of departure.

Music and musicians took the biggest and funniest hit. According to Keillor, in an arrangement by Daniel Kallman, Bizet was originally a guy from Omaha named Dwayne. During a rowdy "Musician's Fight Song," the orchestra contributed laughs, barks and shouts on cue, and in a vocal duet with first violinist Rachel Robinson, Keillor offered "Ode to Not That Bad," as written by Beethoven if he'd been a Midwesterner.

Insults were meted out in equal measure in the centerpiece, "The Young Lutheran's Guide to the Orchestra," where it turned out

that the only proper instruments for a young Lutheran to play are percussion—"you learn a lot of patience"—and the harp—"an instrument for a very nice person with powerful forearms."

But Keillor—whose velvety baritone, with its shades of light and dark, is a virtuoso's instrument—also shifted into a gentler mode, most remarkably in "My Life," a haunting ballad by Iris Dement and in an exquisite poetic reminiscence about two wild ponies who "bow shyly like wet swans."

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