

Keillor's Show Anything But Woebegone

BY JEFF MANOOKIAN

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Garrison Keillor traveled from Lake Wobegon to Salt Lake City Monday to appear with the Utah Symphony in Abravanel Hall.

Before Keillor stepped onstage, guest conductor Philip Brunelle opened the program with a controlled Overture to Glinka's "Russlan and Ludmilla." Although keeping the tempo at a manageable pace, his four-square style direction left the musicians cold and on their own for any interpretive verve.

Keillor entered to take command of the show. This grand master of wit and wisdom delighted his audience through a seemingly short 2½-hour evening.

Keillor possesses a distinctive voice, with just enough raspiness in it to appeal to anybody. He sang, with his own original lyrics, "The Life of Bizet." A ballad of a Midwesterner named Duane Bizet rejecting his traditional Lutheran roots only to escape to Paris and become a man of the world — and even changing his first name to Georges.

With some text modification, Keillor vocalized Cole Porter's "Let's Fall in Love." And, "for the people at the WordPerfect Corporation," he bemoaned the complexities of computers and their operation with "The Internet Song."

Accompanied by music from Mendelssohn's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Keillor narrated a tale of his first failed attempt at love when he was in his teens. The orchestra lost its precision at various places during Keillor's humorous monologue. No

doubt they were more interested in Keillor's performance than their own. And who wouldn't be?

The masterpiece of the evening was "The Young Lutheran's Guide to the Orchestra." With original music by Davidson, Keillor took us on a tour of each instrument of the orchestra, explaining why a Lutheran should not take up the study of any of them — except for the percussion, which requires extreme patience, and the harp, which invokes music of the angels.

Singing along with the melody to the second movement of Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony, Keillor vocalized all his personal pet peeves of concertgoers' noisy etiquette.

In an all-too-real parody of "Music and the Spoken Word," Keillor led into the religious "Hymn to Sweet Corn." This routine included his listing of the Four Pleasures of Life: 1 — Knowing God. 2 — Attaining Knowledge. 3 — The One You Thought of First. And 4 — Sweet Corn.

And what performance from Garrison Keillor would be complete without the "News from Lake Wobegon"? The performer had the audience in stitches and tears in his delivery of a typical day in the life of the mythical small town.

Keillor masterfully finished his program by inviting the audience to sing along in the familiar hymn "At the River," followed by an upbeat encore, "Cat, You Better Come On Home."

Jeff Manookian, Intermountain Chamber Orchestra conductor, is The Tribune's music critic.