

## The Ithaca home companion



BILL WARREN/Journal Staff

**TAKE THAT!** Garrison Keillor, playing the part of Ulysses in a parody of the Greek epic *'The Odyssey'* for his *'A Prairie Home Companion'* radio show, rehearses for the show at Cornell's Bailey Hall Saturday. Fellow cast member Sue Scott, who provided the voices for several characters, is at left.

### Garrison Keillor broadcasts live from Bailey

By JOE WILENSKY  
Journal Staff

ITHACA — Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" might as well have been titled "A Cornell Home Companion" on Saturday, as the famed Lake Wobegon storyteller broadcast his weekly radio show from Bailey Hall.

Keillor and his cast of musicians, voice-over artists and a sound-effects whiz all poked fun at Ithaca culture while rambling through skits, songs and stories. A packed hall of 2,000 people attended the live public radio broadcast, and more than 700 showed up to watch Keillor's rehearsal of the show earlier in the afternoon.

Elaine Smith, of Rochester, wasn't able to get tickets for the live broadcast, but got second-row seats for the rehearsal. She didn't mind. "I could see his eyes twinkling," she said.

Keillor peppered his show with references to Ithaca, Cornell and the Finger Lakes, especially in an elaborate parody of Homer's *the Odyssey*. Keillor played the mythological hero Ulysses, who kills a Cyclops during his voyage home to Ithaca after the Trojan War. But Keillor's Ulysses lives in Ithaca, New York, instead of being king of Ithaca, one of the Greek Ionian islands, and his wife, Penelope, works at the

Ithaca Bakery.

Serena Wong, a 1996 Cornell graduate and chimesmaster, opened both hours of the program playing the McGraw Tower chimes. "I had a lot of fun," Wong said. Keillor interviewed Wong during the show and kidded her about her 161-step climb up and down the tower between her two musical selections.

Keillor narrated a brief history of the Finger Lakes, Cornell University, and moviemaking in Ithaca during the silent era. "This is one of the most beautiful places in the United States ... Upstate New York," Keillor said.

He mentioned the ongoing Ithaca Festival, giving a bow to the tutu-outfitted Dancing Volvos and the Birkenstock Brigade. "This is a town where one could live one's whole life and never run out of choices in granola," Keillor said. "This is a place where one could continue searching for oneself on into your 60s and 70s."

Keillor was joined by award-winning blues singer and musician Rory Block and more than 20 members of the Cornell University Glee Club, who performed several songs, including the Cornell alma mater.

Watching the rehearsal and then the actual broadcast of a radio show was a new and exhilarating experience for



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**LIVE AND IN PERSON:** Ithacans listen to Garrison Keillor during a rehearsal for his *'A Prairie Home Companion'* in Cornell's Bailey Hall.

many fans. "I closed my eyes and just listened," said Dennis Scott, of Rochester. "Your mind goes back to when you hear him on the radio. It's the best of two worlds."

"You can actually see him instead of just hearing him," said Kathryn Bacon, director of communications for WSKG in Binghamton, which sponsored the broadcast. "You can see him creating sound, seeing his creative processes."

"It's either really wonderful or a tragedy that it's a radio show," said Natalie Emlen, of Ellis Hollow. "The stage is so cluttered — the visuals would

be really interesting. It was really wonderful (to see it) that way." She noticed that Keillor had two clocks on the stage floor at his feet, one analog and one digital, showing both the exact time and a running timer of the broadcast.

André Dhondt, a Cornell ornithology professor who moved to the United States from Belgium just three years ago, said he quickly became "A Prairie Home Companion" fan. "It gives us a lot of insight into a lot of American life," he said.

Dhondt said he was most impressed "about the way (Keillor) improvises."