

## Thile discusses 'Prairie Home Companion'

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**ST. PAUL, Minn.** — No more Guy Noir, Private Eye. No more tales of Dusty and Lefty, the luckless cowboys. And no more "News From Lake Wobegon," the imaginary town famous for strong women, good-looking men and above-average children.

Those signature comedy sketches will vanish from the airwaves when humorist and best-selling author Garrison Keillor retires as host of his popular public radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," this summer. After Keillor, steps down, mandolin ace Chris Thile of the bands Punch Brothers and Nickel Creek will step in as the first full-time replacement host in October.

"I thought that the show should press the restart and not try to replicate what it has evolved into," Keillor explained, "but go back to the beginning and revive itself as a music show with comedy

add-ons." The show's name will remain "A Prairie Home Companion" (for now), its home base will stay at the 1,000-seat Fitzgerald Theater in downtown St. Paul, and the live show will keep its two-hour Saturday evening time slot. Keillor says he will remain as executive producer and "a remote, benevolent gray eminence who phones in his thoughts every so often."

"Garrison created a template that I think is immortal," Thile said during a recent interview. "It doesn't feel like any kind of constraint. It's like a license. I feel like I have my license to go and make some good radio."

But if the shows Thile guest-hosted in January and February are any indication, listeners can expect a hipper batch of musical performers. Singer-songwriter Ben Folds, alt-country singer Brandi Carlile, multi-instrumentalist and whistler Andrew Bird



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**Chris Thile** gestures during an interview at the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul, Minnesota. The former Murray, Kentucky, resident will replace Garrison Keillor as host of "A Prairie Home Companion," the popular public radio variety show.

and Paul Simon — perhaps the biggest musical name to ever perform on "Prairie Home" — were among the guests. Thile just had to pick up the phone and see if Simon was available.

Keillor praises Thile's musical connections as well as his respect for old-time bluegrass music.

"It seems to me if anybody was meant to host and produce a musical variety show

that has real intensity and integrity, it's him," Keillor said in a telephone interview.

At 35, Thile is three years older than when Keillor, now 73, started the show in 1974. The sandy-haired singer, a former Murray, Kentucky, resident, gushes when talking about succeeding Keillor.

"The prospect of getting to make things for people on a weekly basis ... is beyond compare. It's what I love to do," said Thile, who began listening to "Prairie Home" as a boy.

Thile was 15 when he made his first appearance on the show in 1996 and has made a dozen or more visits.

Thile plans to write a new song every week that may take into account who is on the show. Pianist Richard Dworsky will remain.

Thile will continue to live in Portland, Oregon, with his wife, actress Claire Coffee of the TV show "Grimm," and their young son.