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## Keillor calmly facing national 'Prairie' show

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ST. PAUL—Sitting in his homey, cluttered, afterthought-of an office at Minnesota Public Radio, Garrison Keillor seemed singularly underwhelmed by the prospect of his impending national radio broadcast.

At 8 p.m. Saturday, listeners to National Public Radio will be exposed to the residents of the mythical town of Lake Wobegon, Minn., when Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion-All Star Review" takes the airwaves from Northrop Auditorium on the University of Minnesota campus. The program can be heard on KRSW-FM (91.7).

Sponsored by Lake Wobegon's chief industries (Jack's Auto Repair and Powdermilk Biscuits), "Prairie Home Companion" kicks off the public network's pledge week. The 4,000 persons who attend the show will pay an admission that will benefit regular Saturday evening broadcasts of the old-time radio variety show on Minnesota Public Radio.

With the large audience and the larger network listenership, the rangy, bearish Keillor would seem the

ideal candidate for the launching pad syndrome, that excited state which precedes major national exposure.

"Oh, I'm excited about the show," Keillor says with mellifluous understatement. "I'm pretty good at not showing excitement. What I have been coping with ever since I was in college is the idea many people seem to have that, to be successful, you have to go and make it someplace else. For a writer, that's New York City. For a musician, it's one of a number of places.

"But radio is such a depressed medium—I mean, it may be making more money than ever but, as far as the craft of radio goes, it's nothing. There's no place to go to make it in this kind of radio. So you make it happen here."

Keillor's sense of humor centers on a certain sly whimsy; he is deft at pricking pretensions. He may make you laugh, but don't call what he does comedy.

"I distinguish humor from comedy," he said. "Comedy is laughs, gags, jokes, punchlines. Humor is more a point of view, characterized by tolerance and patience. It's also characterized by paying attention and observing the world, listening to people. It has its expression in stories, which don't necessarily have a punchline but may be funny.

"That's much more interesting to me than comedy. Comedy is a knack with formulas; it's simply word play. Comedy is very nervous to me; humor is very benevolent."

Keillor wonders whether his humor might be too regional to entertain a national audience: "So much of what we do seems special to this region. I have no idea what to do with my stories or with the sponsors. I suppose I'll just go ahead. I don't know what people in other parts of the country will make of that."

He worries also about degenerating into that nervous species known as the comedian.

"I think people outside of Minnesota are more likely to respond to the stuff I do that I like the least, which are the jokes. I don't want to put that down. But when people come together in an audience and someone stands up in front of them and does humor, people feel nervous if you don't give them something to laugh at. They figure I must be a comedian so where are the laughs?"

Although "Prairie Home Companion" follows the tradition of radio variety shows of the 1930s and 1940s, Keillor doesn't foresee a resurgence of interest in national radio broadcasts, particularly with the dominance of television in modern society.

"I'm pessimistic by nature," Keillor said. "I really doubt that radio can come back. It would be nice to see. What gets spread over television and radio today is some sort of amorphous national culture, which is no culture at all. It's industry. It's commercial culture.

"Radio can serve regional cultures and cultural traditions much better than television can because radio is so much simpler to do. You can have more sophisticated equipment or less sophisticated equipment. Essentially you'll turn out the same product."