

'PRAIRIE COMPANION' IN PUBLIC RADIO ROW

By RICHARD MAHLER

There was a time when internal political debates inside public radio were as calm as life in Lake Wobegon, the Minnesota hamlet conjured up by Garrison Keillor on "A Prairie Home Companion."

The two-hour comedy/variety show (heard 6 p.m. Saturdays on KUSC, 91.5) is a mix of plain Midwestern common sense, unelectrified folk music and Keillor's monologues about life in Lake Wobegon, where the children are all above average.

But for all its serenity, "Prairie Home Companion" has become the hot point in a debate that supposedly puts public radio and about 300 publicly supported stations, as one manager put it, "at a crossroads."

Ron Kramer, general manager of KSOR-FM in Ashland, Ore., is spear-

heading a vigorous campaign challenging the practices of "Prairie Home Companion's" distributor, the fledgling American Public Radio Network. On top of that there are charges of conflict of interest on the part of an APR board member, Wallace A. Smith, general manager of KUSC-FM of Los Angeles. He's one of five National Public Radio station managers who formed the rival APR network in January, 1982, and soon after acquired "Companion" for exclusive distribution.

"If Garrison Keillor ever gets sick, that network's out of business," growled NPR President Frank Mankiewicz last year.

Mankiewicz, Kramer and many others within the public radio industry see "Companion" as a major building block for the privately held APR network. Kramer feels the popular series was used as "a club" to line up more than 200

non-commercial stations that previously had obtained Keillor's show through APR's parent organization, Minnesota Public Radio. Most stations agreed to join American Public Radio last spring—despite higher prices for the program—rather than give up "Prairie Home Companion" and its considerable audience.

Kramer decided to buck the trend as a matter of principle, claiming APR is

modeling itself after commercial radio and violating the rules governing public radio outlets.

"The decision that is made on this issue is going to shape a great deal of what public radio is in the future," Kramer said in a phone interview. "I don't think Congress said or intended to say (to public stations) that we ought to prostitute ourselves in order to survive, and yet that's the implication that's being made by American Public Radio and I think that's the road down which they are trying to lead us."

At issue is APR's decision to market

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PUBLIC RADIO

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"Companion" on an exclusive basis to member stations. The net result is that only one public radio station in each city is permitted to air the program. Kramer and several other station managers insist that programs produced and distributed with taxpayer funds, such as "Companion," must be made available to all public stations.

A key figure in the dispute, Wallace Smith believes that "exclusivity will begin to promote the idea of diversity" on public stations. He points out that National Public Radio, which makes its programming available to all public stations, allows all five Los Angeles County NPR-affiliates to broadcast its daily news magazines, "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered," and in some cases simultaneously.

"I don't believe that we really serve a community well if we make all the same programming available to all of the stations and we end up with a kind of monopoly of sound," says Smith, who is adding a Santa Barbara station to KUSC's mini-network this fall. (KUSC programs KCPB-FM Thousand Oaks, acquired by USC last year.)

In Pasadena, former NPR board member and KPCC-FM general manager John Gregory is angry about KUSC's exclusive hold on APR programming, which includes the Los Angeles Philharmonic concert series and more than a

dozen other mostly fine arts programs.

"KUSC does not cover our signal area," Gregory declares. "No matter what Wallly Smith might say, the residents in those areas will tell you that." Gregory estimates that 2 million potential listeners in KPCC's broadcast range are being denied access to "Prairie Home Companion" and other APR offerings.

Gregory agrees with Kramer that an apparent conflict of interest is raised by Smith's directorship on both APR and NPR boards. Last month, Kramer asked the Federal Communications Commission to investigate the matter and delay renewal of Minnesota Public Radio's six broadcast licenses pending the outcome.

"Obviously," Smith concedes, "I have a special feeling for American Public Radio, and I'm going to want to be able to make that program available through APR. On the other hand, I have incredible interest in the future and success of National Public Radio."

Mankiewicz has backed off from a statement last year alleging that Smith was "out to get rid of (him)." He told Calendar recently that the conflict of interest question and other APR-related issues should more properly be pursued outside the government-supported network.

Kramer "may be right" on exclusivity, said Mankiewicz, but added: "It's a complicated legal question. I suppose ultimately he might be able to get it into court or before some commission, but it's not for me or NPR to decide that."

Meanwhile, APR President Bill Kling, who spearheaded the formation of Minnesota Public Radio in the 1970s, insists that APR is designed to complement, rather than compete, with NPR and justifies exclusivity as a means of serving the public while making programs more attractive for underwriting purposes. "On every charge that Kramer has raised, he has been proven by our legal analysts to be inaccurate," Kling de-

clares.

Kramer's supporters, however, believe in the principle they see at stake. "I agree with Kling that programs should be for the public," concludes KPCC program director Larry Shirk. "It should be for the entire public, though, not just a portion." □

Mahler is West Coast correspondent for Broadcasting magazine.

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

DRAMA

3 p.m.—Captain Radio, X Minus One, Jay Walker, KCSN-FM (88.5)
5 p.m.—Sherlock Holmes, The Noble Bachelor, KCSN-FM (88.5)
6 p.m.—The Empire Strikes Back, Gambler's Choice, KUSC-FM (91.5)
9:30 p.m.—Heartbeat Theater, "Restitution" by Dennis Whitcomb, KLAC (57.0)

INTERVIEW

9:30 a.m.—Page One, discussion of contemporary Jewish issues, KFOX-FM (93.5)
10 p.m.—California Conference Call, guests are Marilyn Heese and Joan Lilly from the Hospital Council, KHTZ-FM (97.1)

MUSIC: CLASSICAL

9 a.m.—Divine Spirit in Music, works by Beethoven and Liszt, KUSC-FM (91.5)
10:30 a.m.—St. Paul Sunday Morning, features members of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, KUSC-FM (91.5)
Noon—Los Angeles Philharmonic, Simon Rattle conducts, KUSC-FM (91.5)
1 p.m.—Sunday Opera, Janacek, The Makropulos Case, KPFR-FM (90.7)
7 p.m.—The Chorus Line, features choral music by Verdi, KFAC (1330 AM, 92.3 FM)
8 p.m.—Library of Congress Chamber Music, features the Deller Consort, KUSC-FM (91.5)
9 p.m.—Delta Opera House, Puccini, Fanciulla del West, KFAC (1330 AM, 92.3 FM)
10 p.m.—Minnesota Orchestra,

Leonard Slatkin conducts, Andre Watts, piano, KUSC-FM (91.5)

Midnight—Concert America, features the Guarnieri String Quartet, KUSC-FM (91.5)

MUSIC: POP

6 a.m.—Sound track of the '60s with Gary Owens, KIS-FM (102.7)
9 a.m.—The Rock Chronicles, "New English Wave," KMET-FM (94.7)
9 a.m.—American Top 40, KIS-FM (102.7)

9 a.m.—Rock and Roll/Rhythm and Blues, features Ike and Tina Turner, KLON-FM (88.1)

9 a.m.—Weekly Music Magazine, KMGG-FM (105.9)

10 a.m.—Country Music Radio Magazine with Harry Newman, KLAC (57.0)

Noon—American Music, features Willie (The Lion) Smith, KLON-FM (88.1)

4:30 p.m.—Jazz Alive, "59th Monterey Jazz Festival," KSBR-FM (88.5)

5 p.m.—King Biscuit Flower Hour, features Culture Club and the Thompson Twins, KLOS-FM (95.5)

5 p.m.—Off the Record with Mary Turner, features Sammy Hagar, KMET-FM (94.7)

6 p.m.—"Steve Allen Show," debut, KKGO-FM (105.1)

6 p.m.—Dr. Demento, KMET-FM (94.7)

9 p.m.—Leonard Feather Show, KKGO-FM (105.1)

9 p.m.—The Magic of Neil Diamond, KMGG-FM (105.9)

9 p.m.—Reggae Revolution, KNAC-FM (105.1)

AM

KABC	730	KGCE	850	KTNQ	1020
KALI	1430	KGRB	900	KTYM	1460
KBRF	740	KHJ	930	KWZ	1480
KDAY	1580	KVEV	870	KWAW	1350
KEZY	1190	KLAC	570	KWOW	1600
KFAC	1330	KLIT	1220	KWRM	1370
KFI	640	KMPC	710	KZLA	1540
KFRN	1280	KNSE	1510	KEGM	950
KFWB	880	KNK	1070	KPRR	1090
KGER	1390	KPRZ	1150	XTRA	690
KGFJ	1230	KPRC	1240		
KGL	1260	KRLA	1110		

FM

KACE	103.9	KJLH	102.3	KPCC	89.3
KBIG	104.3	KJCH	98.7	KPKR	90.7
KBOB	96.3	KKGO	105.1	KQLH	95.1
KCRW	89.9	KLON	88.1	KROQ	106.7
KCSN	88.5	KLOS	95.5	KRTH	101.1
KDDJ	97.5	KLVE	107.5	KSAK	90.1
KEYZ	95.9	KMAX	107.1	KSBR	88.5
KFAC	92.3	KMET	94.7	KSPC	96.7
KFOX	93.5	KMGG	105.9	KSRF	103.1
KFSJ	96.3	KNAC	105.5	KSLJ	90.1
KGIL	94.3	KNJG	92.7	KUSC	91.5
KHCP	99.5	KNDB	92.7	KUTE	101.9
KHTZ	97.1	KHTF	93.5	KWZ	96.7
KK	94.3	KNK	93.1	KWVE	107.9
KKCS	102.7	KOCM	103.1	KXLU	88.9
KIQQ	100.3	KOST	103.5	KYMS	106.3
				KZLA	93.9

9:30 p.m.—Folk Scene, KPFR-FM (90.7)

SPORTS

11 a.m.—Baseball Angels vs Twins, KPCC (77.0)
1 p.m.—Baseball Dodgers vs Padres, KABC (79.0)
7:30 p.m.—Basketball Lakers vs Portland, KLAC (57.0)