

Mon., Apr. 18, 1983

One public radio network beats the odds

By TOM JORY
Associated Press

NEW YORK — "A Prairie Home Companion," heard each weekend by an estimated 2 million faithful, is the loudest manifestation of a program service that some consider a model for public radio in this country.

The show, combining an eclectic mix of bluegrass, country and folk music with a special, down-home brand of humor, is broadcast live from the World Theater in St. Paul, and occasionally elsewhere, every Saturday night. Only one other public radio program, the nightly news show "All Things Considered," from Washington, has a larger audience, about 2.5 million.

"A Prairie Home Companion" is produced by Minnesota Public Radio, which has grown in 16 years from a single station to a network of nine, supported by about 50,000 subscribers who will contribute more than \$1.76 million to MPR in 1983.

MPR is a robust survivor in an unstable environment for non-commercial radio. National Public Radio, of which MPR is a member, recently cut \$2.8 million from its 1983 budget, a bit of surgery that led to the dismissal of at least 30 employees and cancellation of "The Sunday Show" after May 1.

The congressional appropriation for public broadcasting — including television — has dipped from \$172 million in 1982 to \$137 million this year, and will shrink even

more, to \$130 million, in 1984.

Despite a decline in federal support, the Minnesota network has maintained a balanced budget that will increase spending from \$4.5 million for 1982 to \$5.4 million for the current fiscal period.

"We succeed only to the extent that we provide a quality that people are willing to pay for," says William H. Kling, MPR's president.

That includes a full complement of news and public affairs, some of it for sale to commercial stations, and weekly concerts of the Minnesota and St. Paul Chamber orchestras, both of which are provided live to other public radio stations across the country.

In fact, MPR distributes a half-dozen continuing programs and a number of special productions to the 229 members of the American Public Radio

Network, including two news shows from the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., "As It Happens" each weekday evening, and "Sunday Morning."

APR was created a year ago by the Minnesota system and stations in New York, Los Angeles, Cincinnati and San Francisco to produce, market and distribute quality programming to non-commercial stations across the country.

MPR operates, in addition, the Minnesota News Network for small, mostly rural, commercial radio stations in the state, publishes Minnesota Monthly magazine, and sells books, records and other products, most of them drawing on the popularity of "A Prairie Home Companion."

And the Minnesota system is bidding now, as a partner with Continental Cablevision, Inc. for the cable TV franchise for St. Paul.

"I prefer to think of it as another form of communications," Kling says of the cable-TV venture, in which the MPR-Continental proposal is one of three before St. Paul's city fathers. "We've been publishing a magazine, producing books and records. It's not getting us into television, it's just extending our involvement in communications."

The sale or exchange of services for financial gain — MPR would share in the profits of a cable franchise in exchange of use of expertise and facilities — is part of an overall economic plan designed to compensate for the decline in federal support.

Kling says MPR set out in 1981 to double mem-

bership, to 60,000, by the end of 1984, increase corporate support and explore new sources of revenue. The membership drive is ahead of schedule, and Kling says the effort to enlist the help of the business community is on track.

MPR encourages support from corporations and foundations based in Minnesota, including Cargill Inc., H.B. Fuller Co., and 3M Corp., and will receive at least \$535,787 from corporate underwriters in 1983. The Pillsbury Corp. recently announced a program to match new corporate contributions to MPR this year.

Inspired leadership — Kling credits an open-

minded board — is a factor in the MPR success story, but the president says there is another, more basic element involved.

"We are a single-purpose organization, not related to a university, not tied to a TV station," Kling says. "We are concerned solely with radio, and that, I think, is the major difference between us and others in public radio, who must consider the political implications of anything they decide to do."

"I wouldn't be in favor

of federal funding going out of existence," he says. "If those funds hadn't been there when we were getting started, we wouldn't be where we are now."

MOVIE RATING GUIDE
GENERAL AUDIENCE All Ages Admitted
G
PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED Some Material May Not Be Suitable for Pre-Teens
PG
RESTRICTED UNDER 17 Requires Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian
R
NO ONE UNDER 18 ADMITTED
X

FAMILY TWIN CINEMA 4522 E. HUNTINGWAY
WINNER 4 OSCARS
"E.T." 7:35 (PG)
"BLACK STALLION RETURNS" 9:30 (PG)
ALL SEATS \$2.00 / 5:15-7:00

"GANDHI" BEST PICTURE OF YEAR
7:00 (PG)

RIALTO TWIN 874-7080 230 E. BASELINE

"GATES OF HELL" 8:15 (R)
"48 HRS." 8:30, 9:30 (R)
"SPRING BREAK" 8:30 (R)
"LOSIN' IT" 8:30, 10:00 (R)

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"HIGH ROAD TO CHINA"
(PG) (5:00 @ \$2.00), 7:15

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"LONE WOLF McQUADE"
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THE ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN

HIGHLAND TWINS 7:15 (PG)

"FLASHDANCE" 7:15, 10:45

"RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK" 9:15

48 HRS. 9:00

CREST CINEMAS II 884-1211
Matinees Daily — Box Office Opens 10:00

The Outsiders 2:30, 6:30, 10:30

JOY STICKS 2:30, 6:30, 10:30

BAD BOYS 3:45, 7:15, 10:30

STUDIO CINEMA 442-8888
"SCREWBALLS" NEWMAN
7:00, 10:45
"THE VERDICT" 11:15

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