

and book collection through BAM the Beatles for an coming special, as "Groupie — a Sex Rock Odys- And I think it's because people library's tapes and albums.

'Prairie Home Companion' offbeat, but well-loved

By Edward Stiles
Gannett News Service

Lake Wobegon, a mythical Minnesota community, is not a hub of tension and excitement.

But host Garrison Keillor brings "News from Lake Wobegon" to the world every Saturday night on a radio program called "A Prairie Home Companion," and it's apparently appreciated.

In an age fascinated with computers, celebrities and life in the fast lane, Lake Wobegon isn't even in the slow lane. It's parked alongside the road — "the little town that time forgot, that the decades cannot improve," as Keillor describes it.

That's just the way 2 million public radio listeners around the country like it.

"Our show is kind of an odd duck for a lot of radio stations," producer Margaret Moos admitted. It's not what one associates with traditional public radio. The program is a mixture of comedy, jazz, and folk music that has a strong identity with small-town America.

It is an original. And it is born largely out of Keillor's seemingly bottomless fund of creativity. He tells a story about Lake Wobegon during the broadcast, which features songs, advertising spoofs and comedy routines that he also

writes.

Listeners have been clamoring for tapes of his monologues, so producers of this Minnesota Public Radio show have obliged with selections from "News from Lake Wobegon" on cassettes. The collection of four tapes (one for each season) sells for \$30; individual cassettes are \$8.

Moos and the technical director took to the studio and listened to tapes of the old shows. "It was just terrific," Moos said. "I've listened over and over and I find myself still moved by so much of it, to laughter and to tears."

There is something in Keillor's delivery, in his distinctive voice

and in these little stories, that creates some irresistible chemistry fascinating to small-town Iowans and big city Bostonians alike.

His descriptions are the sort of thing that radio is good at. They move too slowly for TV, which would have offered a couple of car chases and a shooting or two in the time it takes Keillor to warm to his subject. But it works because he has a radio presence, a radio personality.

TV comes in for a gentle swipe once in a while on the program.

In one of his monologues, Keillor told the story of when his family got a TV set. His dad bought it during a time when all the kids

had been sick off and on for a couple of months.

"He brought home a TV set, thinking it would make us feel better, and it did. Though I've always associated television since then with lying in bed sick with a high fever, people running to the bathroom to throw up. It's always been my feeling about it."

Which is about the worst thing that this gentle man says about anything. He pokes fun, to be sure, at small-town foibles. But he tells listeners, essentially, that being genuine and honest is good — even if it is funny at times. He tells us that we can find a lot in ourselves to laugh about.