

## Today's topic

# Shows aimed at Prairie Home Companion gap

CHARLESTON, W. Va. (AP) — Garrison Keillor's departure from mythical Lake Wobegon creates a void in public broadcasting, but producers and distributors of other shows hope his 4 million listeners will leave their radios on.

A half-dozen programs, including four already in production, are targeting the audiences that have been listening to "A Prairie Home Companion," the Saturday evening show Keillor began on Minnesota Public Radio show in 1974.

"Some people won't listen to radio anymore, but some will listen to the other shows and discover that radio is wonderful," said Dean Boal of National Public Radio, which distributes "Mountain Stage," "Our Front Porch," "Flea Market" and "Whad'ya Know?"

"I mean no ill will toward Minnesota Public Radio, but Garrison's leaving does open new opportunities for everyone in broadcasting," Boal said.

Keillor, who became public radio's most celebrated personality after publishing a best-selling book about his fictional hometown of Lake Wobegon, decided to leave "Prairie Home Companion" after 13 years and move

to his wife's native Denmark. His last original broadcast was Saturday.

Boal and other radio executives say they are not trying to replace Keillor.

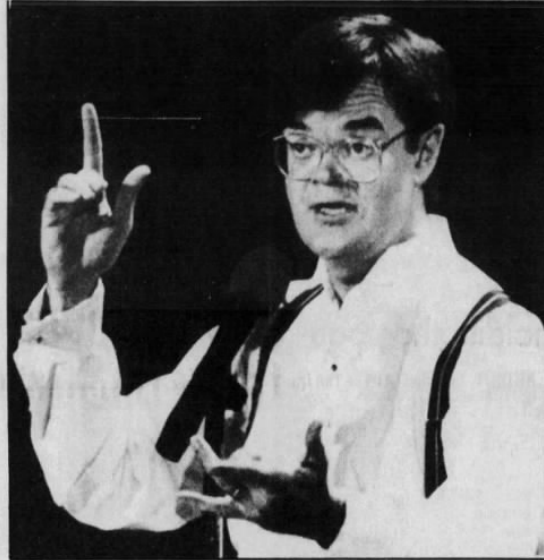
"If you confront people with something in the place of something they love, they may stay away from it," said Stuart Rosenberg, producer and host of "Flea Market."

"Mountain Stage," which National Public Radio began distributing last June, is the closest of the NPR offerings to "Prairie Home Companion," which is distributed by rival American Public Radio. Both are two-hour shows performed before live audiences.

Andy Ridenour, who produces "Mountain Stage" here, played down any similarities and said, "Radio variety shows did not begin with 'Prairie Home Companion.'" But he said some of his program's 87 stations are moving the show to better times in an apparent attempt to get some of the audience.

WCPN in Cleveland, for example, will begin carrying "Mountain Stage" at 6 p.m. Saturday — "Prairie Home's" slot for the past 2½ years.

Minnesota Public Radio has a new show in the works that features Noah



Garrison Keillor conducts a sing-along during the final performance of the "Prairie Home Companion" radio show.

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