

Keillor sub draws substantial public-radio flak

By Joe Logan
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PHILADELPHIA — It has been only three months since the national debut of "Good Evening With Noah Adams," the replacement for Garrison Keillor's popular "A Prairie Home Companion," but already some public-radio stations are grumbling that the new show is boring.

"I think what they have done is offered a watered-down version of 'A Prairie Home Companion,'" says Rohn Steelman, program director of WUHF-FM in Houston, which aired two "Good Evening" shows before deciding not to carry it again.

David Hosley, station manager for San Francisco's KQED-FM, which does carry the show, agrees. "You want to like Noah, and you want to like the show, but it's hard."

Mark Vogelzang, program director of Philadelphia's WHY-FM, which, like 190 other public-radio stations, has a 26-week contract to air "Good Evening," is even more blunt: "The show lacks focus. And I sense a dissatisfaction within the public-radio community."

Hosley of KQED says that public-radio executives are evidently not alone in their assessment.

"A couple of weeks ago, instead of the regular show, Noah hosted a live call-in show," he says. "People were calling in and saying very kindly, very politely, that the show just wasn't making it."

Adams says he has grown tired of being compared with Keillor, whom he admires. The low-key former host of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" stepped into a difficult position when he moved to Minnesota last year to take up where Keillor left off.

Keillor, a best-selling author who writes for The New Yorker magazine, had become an icon to many public-radio fans. Over the years, his live variety show, with its home-



Noah Adams in tight spot

spun tales about Lake Wobegon, had come to attract 4 million weekly listeners and catapulted him onto the cover of Time magazine. So popular was the show that it accounted for a disproportionate chunk of contributions during fund-raisers.

So, when Keillor bade the show farewell in June, Minnesota Public Radio, which produced it, and American Public Radio, which distributed it, faced an enormous challenge in holding onto listeners accustomed to tuning in the radio Saturday evenings.

After scouring the country, they decided that Adams, a native Ken-

tuckian with a soothing baritone voice and a Keillor-like demeanor, was the man to carry the torch. They wanted to replace "Companion" with a show that was also a live variety show, one with eclectic musical guests, with literary pretensions and with a sense of humor.

But they also wanted Adams to put his own imprint on the new show, rather than try to redo "A Prairie Home Companion" without Keillor. But that's what "Good Evening" sounds like.

Adams does not share this view, and he made that clear last week.

"I have been answering those questions for almost a year," he said, clearly frustrated by the continued comparison. "It's not something I think about anymore."

Adams points out that he has done some things differently. He often has authors read their works on the air, for example. And where Keillor entralled listeners with his "News From Lake Wobegon" monologue, Adams offers something different, "St. Croix Notes," a weekly personal essay.

But Vogelzang and the others say the comparisons are indeed warranted. "Good Evening" was positioned in the same time slot; it is also

broadcast from the World Theater; it features many similar guests; and it was touted by its producers as the answer to public radio's Saturday night problem.

"Nobody has canceled — yet," says Vogelzang. "But this show was positioned as the next great hope for Saturday night, and expectations are very high."

It should come as no surprise, then, that WHY-FM and KQED, both of which began fund-raising drives Monday, will be closely monitoring the contributions made during Saturday's "Good Evening."

As critical as Vogelzang, Steelman and Hosley are, they are quick to point out that some public-radio stations are quite happy with "Good Evening." And they say that virtually everyone in public radio is pulling for it to succeed.

"It takes a long time for something like this to settle down, and we're making judgments after three months," says Hosley. "'A Prairie Home Companion' was a phenomenal success, and it is unlikely that anybody who comes after Keillor will attain that kind of success. I think most program directors will give it a year, maybe even two."

RADIO DIAL

AM

- KNDL (530-AM)** — Airport travelers advisory.
- KJMM (580-AM)** — New age/jazz.
- KVOI (690-AM)** — Contemporary Christian music.
- KCEE (790-AM)** — Rock oldies.
- KFLT (830-AM)** — Christian music/IMS news.
- KNST (940-AM)** — News/talk/sports.
- KTKT (990-AM)** — Adult contemporary.
- KGVB (1080-AM)** — Big Band.
- KCKY (1150-AM)** — Country music/sports.

- KQTL (1210-AM)** — Spanish language.
 - KCUB (1290-AM)** — Country music.
 - KMRR (1330-AM)** — Swing era.
 - KTUC (1400-AM)** — News.
 - KFXX (1450-AM)** — Contemporary hits.
 - KAIR (1490-AM)** — Rock oldies.
 - KUAT (1550-AM)** — Jazz/public affairs.
 - KXEW (1600-AM)** — Mexican country music.
- * FM
- KUAT (90.5-FM)** — Classical/public affairs.
 - KXCI (91.7-FM)** — Community radio.

- KFXX (92.1-FM)** — Contemporary hits.
- KWFM (92.9-FM)** — Light rock.
- KRQQ (93.7-FM)** — Contemporary hits.
- KJYK (94.9-FM)** — Easy listening.
- KLPX (96.1-FM)** — Rock.
- KXMG (98.3-FM)** — Spanish adult contemporary.
- KIIM (99.5-FM)** — Country music.
- KHYT (101.7-FM)** — Classic hits.
- KFXX (103.9-FM)** — Contemporary hits.
- KAMJ (105.5-FM)** — Adult contemporary (Phoenix).
- KUPD (106.3-FM)** — Rock (Phoenix).