

Why Keillor can't take 'Prairie Home' home

By JIM POLLOCK

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Run a finger down the list of stops for The Third Annual Farewell Performance of A Prairie Home Companion and you'll find a respectable share for the Midwest. Ames on May 27 follows Springfield, Ill., and Madison, Wis., and precedes Kansas City.

But you won't find St. Paul, where Garrison Keillor's unique radio show made its home for years, and you won't find its partner, Minneapolis.

"The thought of doing the show in the Twin Cities would be terrifying," Keillor said last week. "The idea would keep me awake at night. You wouldn't stand up at a family reunion and do your routine, would you?"

Somehow it doesn't seem right that the much-praised creator of the mythical town of Lake Wobegon would be cautious about performing anywhere. But they always told us he was quiet and sensitive; besides, he tried the Twin Cities last year and came away with reasons to be terrified.

"I did a benefit for a friend last year in Minneapolis," he said. "A benefit — the most high-minded motivation there is — and it was the worst experience I've ever had on stage. I walked out on stage, and nobody clapped. I told some stories, and nobody laughed. We had a little intermission, and when I came back after that, half of the audience had left.

"I should have come out, recited 'Invictus' and left to a standing ovation," he mused. "When I go back to St. Paul, they know me too well."

In short, there's enough out there to keep a shy and sensitive guy shy and sensitive, no matter how much glory rains down upon him.

But a frosty reception in Minnesota isn't enough to keep Keillor from his annual Farewell Tours, and it isn't enough to keep him off the air. He announced last week at the Public Radio Conference in San Francisco that he will begin a new series of radio programs this fall, with the working title, "Garrison Keillor's American Radio Company of the Air."

According to Minnesota Public Radio, the new program will be performed live in New York and other places — including The World Theater

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in St. Paul. It will begin Saturday, Sept. 30, and run for 12 consecutive Saturdays. Then it's expected to take a break until another 12-week run beginning next March.

The format will include sketches and monologues by Keillor and performances of "classic American music."

Keillor described the selections as "music that transcends ego and money, that is American art — Fats Waller, Jimmy Rodgers, Aaron Copland, the old hymns, Leonard Bernstein — all the great things that every American ought to hear at least twice."

Keillor's Third Annual Farewell Tour opened Saturday in Greenville, S.C., and ends June 10 in Los Angeles. The May 27 performance at C.Y. Stephens Auditorium in Ames begins at 8 p.m. Accompanying him on the tour are Prairie Home veterans Robin and



Garrison Keillor

Linda Williams, Kate MacKenzie, Rich Dworsky, Tom Keith and Dan Rowles.

He's also working on his next book, which will be his fifth. "I always have another book under way before the previous book is published, so I can endure the reviews," he said. "I like to get up a good head of steam before I get shot down."

Of his earlier show on Minnesota Public Radio, Keillor said: "I left because I had to, and I think it was good to, but it would be foolish to stay away too long. I miss the show and the audience, but my reason for wanting to get back is that I think I can do a better show than I did before."

Despite his lofty recognition factor, Keillor said he doesn't receive offers for television and movie projects.

"If I was serious about show business, I would have an agent, and then I would hear those proposals," he said, "but the people who tend to write to me tend to be graduate students from Iowa City who want to do a book together. They say, 'I'll write the poems, and you write the foreword.'"

Where the recognition factor does come in handy is on a stroll down a city street. "I would feel hurt if I walked down the street and former listeners did not say hello," Keillor said. "Occasionally I have seen former listeners pass me by, and I have stopped them and asked them why they were high-hatting me."

How does one recognize a former listener?

"I can pick them out of a crowd in the dark."

GOING PLACES

Let kids help plan summer vacation

With a little planning, a vacation can be an educational experience for children, and they probably won't even realize they're learning. Vikki Morain, Iowa State University Extension family life specialist, offers some hints to help in the preparations:

- Check the library for picture books, maps and other materials containing information about the places you plan to visit. Travel guides are a great source of information and can help in plotting your route.