

66
DAILY NEWS
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## TV

# Keillor: He'll have Manhattan

**By NOEL HOLSTON**

**G**ARRISON KEILLOR gave his regards to Brooklyn, and now he's Broadway bound. When Keillor's "American Radio Company of the Air" begins its second season in October, it no longer will be broadcast from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, its New York City home for the past eight months. It will originate from the Lamb's Theater in Manhattan, a short hop from Broadway.

Built in 1904 and originally a theatrical fraternity club, the Lamb's Theater has an illustrious history. Its lodgers over the years included the great tenor Enrico Caruso and the composer Richard Rodgers, who is said to have written the first draft of "Oklahoma!" while in residence there.

Moving Keillor's show there is a nod to the future, not the past. Keillor and Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) are looking to raise the show's profile and lower its costs.

The first season of "American Radio Company of the Air" (ARCA for short) was both successful and frustrating — frustrating in a manner peculiar to public broadcasting.

To begin with, there's the matter of cost. The Saturday night show, airing here on WNYC-AM and FM, is the most expensive on public radio. The first season was budgeted at \$2.6 million, and MPR insiders say it went several hundred thousand dollars over budget. In the larger broadcasting arena, that's small potatoes. Not so for public radio.

But for that amount, Keillor and company produced 20 two-hour variety shows featuring a 20-piece orchestra and a sketch-comedy ensemble with almost as many members as that of "Saturday Night Live."

The relative inexpensiveness is not much consolation to public-radio stations that carry ARCA, especially smaller stations for which paying even \$500 more for the show would be such a burden they might drop it.

MPR could raise the price to stations if ARCA, like Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" before it, were a godsend to membership recruiters, a show easy to "pledge around." But ARCA hasn't achieved that prominence, in part because it's new and different from "Prairie Home Companion," in

part because its rerun schedule has been inconsistent.

And there was the matter of ticket sales. Though not a major revenue source, poor ticket sales do matter when a show is as tightly budgeted as ARCA. The Brooklyn Academy of Music, chosen primarily for its short-notice availability when Keillor announced his return to radio last summer, is actually a complex of three theaters ranging in size from about 1,000 to 2,300 seats.

Week to week, ARCA shifted from theater to theater at the complex, depending on which house wasn't otherwise engaged, but even the smaller halls proved hard to fill.

The reason isn't hard to figure out after a visit to the academy. The theaters themselves are gorgeous — the 2,300-seat opera house is a breathtaking, double-balconied jewel — but they are in the kind of neighborhood where barbed wire is considered a roofing material — in short, not an attractive destination for people homesick for Lake Wobegon, Minn.

ARCA producer Phillip Byrd, who arranged the move to the Lamb's Theater, believes it will go a long way toward solving the cost problems. And being so near Broadway, with a highly visible marquee and only 350 seats to fill, the Lamb should transform the show from a hard sell to a hot ticket, Byrd said.

The second season will be a full 52-week slate, 26 new episodes mingled with 26 ARCA reruns. To encourage the habitual-listening patterns that help public-radio stations at pledge time, reruns of "A Prairie Home Companion" will be removed from the broadcast mix.

The second season has been budgeted at \$3.2 million.

**K**EILLOR said he doesn't plan any big changes for next season, except perhaps abandoning the lap-top computer that was used to time the show's segments. He believes it cost the show spontaneity.

While the show's first season has been financially cloudy, it has been an artistic success. Road shows to Atlanta and Memphis in May easily sold out 2,000-seat theaters. Critical response has been highly favorable.

No wonder. ARCA may well be the best musical



**LOOKING FOR HIGHER PROFILE:** Garrison Keillor

variety series in the history of broadcasting — yes, broadcasting, not just radio. Ed Sullivan's "Toast of the Town" never came close to this show's amiability and consistent professionalism. "A Prairie Home Companion," which did come close, was much narrower in its appeal.

Under Keillor's guidance, the New York shows have been by turns unapologetically corny and sophisticated and sometimes both at once.

— Scripps Howard News Service

FINE TUNING

**7:30 p.m.** (9) "Baseball." Cardinals-Mets.

**8:00** (13) "The Metropolitan Opera Presents." Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen: Die Walkure." Simulcast with WQXR-FM (96.3).

**11:30** (4) "Tonight." Jay Leno with Molly Ringwald, Kadeem Hardison and Lindsay Wagner.

**12:30 a.m.** (4) "Late Night." David Letterman with musician John Mayall and boxing trainer Kevin Rooney.

**1:30** (4) "Later." Bob Costas with Dan Rather.

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