



Garrison Keillor is confident that a live telecast of "A Prairie Home Companion" in theaters will entertain fans of the radio show.

G FORCE | GARRISON KEILLOR

## Lake Wobegon in high-def

**C**an great radio translate into great theater? We'll know more Feb. 4, when "A Prairie Home Companion," the public radio show hosted by "Lake Wobegon" creator Garrison Keillor, streams into 500 movie theaters, live and in high-definition. The radio broadcast has a weekly audience of 4 million listeners and was the inspiration for the 2006 Robert Altman film built around Keillor and his ensemble cast. Back on the airwaves after suffering a mild stroke in September, Keillor, 67, called from San Francisco, where he was prepping for a recent show.

JOSEPH P. KAHN

**Q.** How's your health been since the stroke?

**A.** It's fine. The only noticeable effect is a slight slurring of speech, so I stay away from words like "Mississippi" and "insolvency." My wife hasn't noticed any, though, and she would be the first to. Not that I talk that much at home.

**Q.** Have you cut back on work commitments?

**A.** I'm doing as much as ever. But your standards go up when something like this happens. You become less amenable to other people's ideas. It's something that should probably happen to a person in his early 30s.

**Q.** Your radio show exists largely in the space between listeners' ears. Any risk it'll lose some magic by being telecast?

**A.** The threat is the same you face with any show: that you'll do a bad show, but not a bad enough show to really interest people. The real danger is boring people to tears.

**Q.** So why televise it?

**A.** Everyone who works for me is younger than I am and intrigued by the power of television. I need to amuse them by trying this.

**Q.** Did Altman's film make you think, let's try

another screen version but make it more our own?

**A.** [Laughs] You give us too much credit. It came about because Cinecast had produced a telecast of the Tchaikovsky opera "Eugene Onegin" that blew my wife and me away.

**Q.** Will this show truly be live, or taped and edited?

**A.** Absolutely live, which is one of the points. People who come to the theater will see the live show. The following Saturday, listeners will hear the same show, rebroadcast and perhaps edited slightly.

**Q.** Sounds like a high-wire act.

**A.** We've been doing this show for a million years, so it's not a very high wire. Maybe 4 feet above the ground.

**Q.** One-off or first in a series?

**A.** Probably a one-off. A live radio show is what we do. I've never seen the show myself, though, and I'm kind of curious to.

**Q.** What else are you working on?

**A.** One project is a Christmas play. People love going to the theater around Christmastime, but maybe they've seen "A Christmas Carol" three times and would enjoy something else.

**Q.** Speaking of Christmas, you took some heat for a recent column in which you wrote, "Christmas is a Christian holiday — if you're not in the club, buzz off." How serious were you?

**A.** Well, I've always wanted to use that line: "Don't mess with the Messiah." It was a somewhat tongue-in-cheek column, though, and I think I signaled those parts of it. When you go after Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Unitarians as the source of the problem, that should probably give it away that you're not being entirely serious.

*Interview was edited and condensed.*