

# Garrison Keillor brings Companion to theatres

Host will finally watch brainchild in special broadcast

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One thousand, two hundred and thirty-nine shows. Over 36 years. And Garrison Keillor has never watched himself as host of A Prairie Home Companion.

"I've seen it backstage on what I assume is a fixed security camera at (New York's) Town Hall," he said. That doesn't count.

After all these years and all those shows, the founder and voice of all things Prairie Home can view No. 1,240 after it's beamed live tonight from St. Paul's Fitzgerald Theater to more than 500 movie theatres across the United States and Canada. The show will be replayed on the radio Saturday in its usual time slot and then rescreened in theatres next Tuesday.

Keillor did not concoct this scenario so he could finally watch himself in action. NCM Fathom/Cinecast, a Colorado company that does live-to-theatre broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera, approached PHC. In Canada, Cineplex is screening the production.

"They besieged us. They surrounded us. They beat on our door. Our phone did not stop ringing," Keillor said. "We were accosted everywhere by Cinecast representatives, people in shark-skin suits, beautiful women bearing expensive gifts. We couldn't say no."

The courtship lasted a year.

**PREVIEW**  
A Prairie Home Companion plays tonight at 6 p.m. at Scotiabank Chinook and Park Place in Lethbridge



Tom Wallace, McClatchy Newspapers

Garrison Keillor, host of A Prairie Home Companion, will finally get to watch the radio show he created when it's shown on more than 500 movie screens throughout the U.S. and Canada — including Calgary.

What persuaded Keillor was seeing the Metropolitan Opera's Eugene Onegin at a theatre in Maplewood, Minn. "It was the most gorgeous experience," he said. "The camerawork was just exemplary. It was a model for how a live event should be."

Keillor originally planned a lineup of regulars for this special broadcast: Twin Cities singers Jearlyn Steele and Jevetta Steele as well as vocalists Heather Masse from New York and Robin and Linda Williams from Virginia.

Exhibitors hoped for bigger names, though, so last week Keillor gave them one: Elvis Costello, the British songman, Rock and Roll Hall of Famer and TV talk-show host.

"We needed some more intensity," Keillor explained via e-mail from Oregon. "Especially after I realized that I would be in the show."

Of course Keillor is going to be in the show. But at age 67, he is talking about finding a new host, something he first mentioned last fall after suffering a stroke on Labor Day. That wasn't foggy-headed, post-stroke babble. He's serious.

"I think about it a lot," he said. "I do want the show to continue. It needn't replicate what has gone before."

As executive producer, he envisions more of a music show that would appeal to a younger audience, with a younger host.

"We wouldn't replace me with somebody else in the twilight of life. You would pick somebody in their 20s. It would be wonderfully different. I think it would still need to be a live show and have some Midwestern identity and incorporate some comic elements. They could change the theme song if they wanted. I'm going to change my life in a year or two."

Right now, however, he's just trying to make it through his discombobulated week, with the show two days earlier than usual.

"What am I going to do with Saturday?" he asked. "I should take my wife out on Saturday night."

At least he knows what he's doing next Tuesday. He's going to a movie theatre for the PHC rebroadcast: "I intend to force myself to sit and watch it."

Finally.