

Vermont Greet 'Prairie Home Companion'

By JEFF ARONSON

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The crowd welcoming the visitors from Lake Wobegon looked as eclectic and eager as those at any town meeting. Only a month of solid sunshine could have brought equivalent happiness to the crowd that attended this opening of a "Prairie Home Companion."

Garrison Kiellor's bucolic bonanza filled Middlebury College's Meade Chapel Friday night for a weekend taping of the Public Radio spectacular. Tonight's performance, with all its wonder, will traverse the nation's air waves live.

"Prairie Home Companion" exposes the delights of brilliant



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writing, cheery music and vivid imagination. The patter of stories, chitchat and enterprising advertisements gently reveal our foibles, but never flay our flaws.

Kiellor and his musical troupes appeared dressed like ministers at a convention, ever so slightly uncomfortable in their suits and

ties. The Butch Thompson Trio drove its way through several light jazz pieces, and the Stoney Lonesome fiddled and sang with abandon.

Special Vermont treats included the native Margaret MacArthur family featuring songs handcrafted in Vermont, and Middlebury's own Disparat 8, a fine barbershop chorus.

Yet the music only soothed the beast, waiting savagely for Kiellor to recite. A wide, bashful grin above the bucket jaw signaled the start of an ad for Bertha's Kitty Boutique's "bed guards," or Home Defense Hardware's structural wallpaper for older homes.

It meant a description of choirs, school and church, moth-

ers who believe oatmeal to be "the vital substance of life," Swedish hot ketchup, and long endearing tales of home and hope.

It meant trips from St. Paul to Burlington aboard Pop Wiggins' Air Minnesota, which "turned left over Lake Champlain as never done before to offer that special view."

It meant a message from the phone company exposing unnecessary delays in answering telephones. "Ask not for whom the phone rings, it rings for thee."

"Prairie Home Companion" ended with the hymn "Turn Your Radio On." Since only rural piracy or urban theft will garner you tickets, best to remain home and do just that.