

NPR's World of Lake Wobegon Broadcast Live From Middlebury

By CHRISTOPHER GRAFF

The Associated Press
MIDDLEBURY — The magical make-believe world of Garrison Keillor came alive for Vermonters Saturday as "A Prairie Home Companion" opened a tour of the Northeast that will take it to New York and Boston.

Keillor, whose homespun humor prompts laughs and sighs for times gone by, transformed Middlebury College's Mead Chapel into the stage for the National Public Radio program that is beamed every Saturday night to 2 million avid listeners.

"Middlebury is a beautiful place," Keillor told his national radio audience. "If you imagined in your mind the ideal of a New England town it would be a lot like Middlebury.

"It's amazing anyone would ever graduate from a place like this."

A special satellite dish was erected to carry the music and tangled tales of Lake Wobegon from the live performance to living rooms everywhere.

Each week Keillor serves up musicians and a magical tour of Lake Wobegon, Minn., "the little town that time forgot."

"It's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon," Keillor reported Saturday night, rocking on his feet, his red socks, which matched his red tie, peeking out from under his pants. This was the night of the junior-senior prom in Lake Wobegon, Keillor said, launching into an intimate description of his prom years ago.

Vermont musicians are highlighting all three Vermont performances, mixing with the regular musicians and the wry and dry



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Garrison Keillor, who hosts the National Public Radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," brought his act to Middlebury College Saturday night. The show, part of an East Coast tour, was beamed to 2 million listeners.

Keillor humor that is the hallmark of the popular program.

The foot-stomping, French-Canadian music of the Burlington Beaudoin family was featured Saturday night, along with the Word of Mouth Chorus of Plainfield, and regulars: the Butch Thompson Trio, Peter Ostroushko and Stoney Lonesome.

Keillor is a shy, soft-spoken man, who came up with the idea of the live radio broadcast in 1974 while writing an article for the New Yorker on the last performance of the Grand Ole Opry in the old Ryman Auditorium.

"I remember the first show we did," said Margaret Moos, the program's executive producer. "There were about 20 people in the big hall and 22 musicians."

For six years "A Prairie Home Companion" was featured regularly on Minnesota Public Radio, building a strong following that spilled over into other states in 1980 when National Public Radio began carrying the broadcasts.

The show's national run began with 30 public radio stations in 1980. It is now carried by 202, including stations in Alaska and Hawaii.

The show's East Coast tour is a sellout.

In Middlebury lines to purchase tickets began forming at 3 a.m. on the day they went on sale in March. Six hours later, when the ticket sales began, there were 3,000 people waiting to purchase the 2,300 available seats.

The Prairie Home crew heads this week to New York City, where all four shows — 6,000 tickets — have been sold out. The next week it's on to Boston for five shows, then back to home base, Minnesota's World Theater, where 1,000 people attend each week's mixture of music and humor.

Preservation Groups Honors Leahy

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., has been honored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He received a certificate of commendation for "his efforts nationally and in Vermont."

Leahy was credited by the organization with bringing about a 250 percent increase in federal funding for historic preservation during his first year on the Senate Appropriations Committee.