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## Happy 10th in Lake Wobegon

**P**UBLIC RADIO'S most popular weekly series (heard by more than three million people) celebrates its 10th anniversary tonight. "A Prairie Home Companion" is heard here on WNYC-FM Saturdays from 6 to 8 p.m. (repeated on WNYC-AM Sundays at noon). The offbeat show from St. Paul, Minn., is a musical variety hour hosted by writer-humorist Garrison Keillor.

The show has been called a cross between the Grand Ole Opry and "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Each week, Keillor stands before the mikes of a run-down theater and tells stories about Lake Wobegon—"the town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve"—where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above-average.

**LAKE WOBEGON** is a figment of Keillor's wild imagination, but some of the show's faithful listeners have adopted it as their hometown.

The show combines storytelling, comedy and music—bluegrass, jazz, polkas. It was conceived by Keillor (he never uses his name on the air because he says it's too difficult to pronounce) in 1974 when he wrote a magazine story about the Grand Ole Opry's last performance in Nashville's old Ryman Auditorium, its home for many years before the completion of the present Opryland.

"I used to hear the show when I was a kid," said Keillor. "Its liveness



Garrison Keillor

appealed to me then; it charged the show with excitement above and beyond the music and, after writing about it, I felt attracted to it again."

Keillor returned to Minnesota where he had been host of a public radio show and presented the idea of "Prairie Home Companion" to his boss. "Two months later, we were in business," said Keillor.

The series is carried by 218 stations nationwide. Its popularity has even spread overseas. Last year, the staff produced eight programs for broadcast in Sweden and Australia.

Keillor credited his early failure as a stand-up comic for driving him toward story-telling. "I started out telling true stories from my childhood dressed up as fiction," he said, "and then discovered Lake Wobegon as a place to set them so as to put some distance between them and the innocent persons I was talking about."

And, no, there are no such things or places as Powdermilk Biscuits, Bob's Bank, Bertha's Kitty Boutique and the Fearmonger's Shoppe. Sorry about that.

—G.M.