

Prairie Home TV?

As one who has spent many a Saturday evening cooking along with "A Prairie Home Companion," I was delighted recently to read Garrison Keillor's witty and perceptive explanation of why the show ought not move from radio to television:

"I think our show would suffer from a jump into television. The sheer mechanics of television is such as could sink this pretty slim little show, and I don't see that we'd have much to gain from the risk."

Besides, he noted, a lot of people like to cook while listening to the Saturday evening broadcasts, which would be rather difficult if the show were televised: "Good television tends to drive out good cooking."

Is TV Addictive?

He worried, with good reason, that televising the show would replace his audience of happy cooks bustling in the kitchen "amongst fabulous aromas" with a "a bunch of people lined up facing one way and eating Kraft or Stouffer's."

Exactly. Except the next thing I read was that the show was going on television: for a one-time special April 26 to celebrate its return to its newly restored home base, the World Theater in St. Paul.

I guess that ought not alarm me. I, too, have been curious about how the show looks to its studio audience. And I'd love to see what the World Theater looks like. If televised coverage would force me to rearrange all my mental images, so would a visit to the studio. While I doubt the pictures will ever be as good on television as they are on the radio, espe-



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cially during the "It was a quiet week in Lake Wobegon" monologues that are the radio show's heart and foundation, I don't have to watch.

In any case, a single appearance on television might not mean disaster. Perhaps television is something that a radio show can take just a single nip of with no harm. But the danger is insidious, somewhat like trying to put chocolate chips, just once, in the kids' bowls of Raw Bits.

It Might Succeed

The worry is not that the experiment would fail, but that it would succeed: that it would attract a new and wider audience, tempting everyone to try it again; that it would quickly be apparent to everyone that since good television must be more than radio with pictures, changes needed to be made; and that, finally, there would be no containing television's ravenous appetite, which would ultimately devour a show that is delightful precisely because it is a "pretty slim little show" utterly unlike anything else around.

Even Saturday night cooks quickly learn that there are some recipes that don't do well for large groups and strangers. The spicy and offbeat dishes that delight a band of friends willing to share a little risk are not the things for banquets.

"A Prairie Home Companion" — like some of the cooking done by its listeners — is not for people averse to risks.

No Improvement

Television is another matter. While an occasional TV dinner may not hurt the long-term cooking at all, it would be an ominous sign to be invited over to Julia Child's to eat something from Stouffer's.

The decades cannot improve Lake Wobegon, and television will not improve "A Prairie Home Companion."

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