

## Let's party for the *old* World

By Colin Covert/Staff Writer

**T**he plaster dust has cleared. The battalions of carpenters, painters and acoustic engineers have departed. The herculean, yearlong restoration is at an end. The old World Theater is back, with all its Old World charm restored. And Garrison Keillor, that creator of rural dreamscapes, now has a dream theater from which to broadcast.

The World marks its official reopening tonight with a coming-out party of lavish proportions. The \$150-a-person event, billed as "an intimate evening with the bard of Lake Wobegon," features a cocktail party including Powdermilk Biscuit canapés, a nonbroadcast benefit performance of Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" and dinner among the exhibits at the Science Museum of Minnesota.



### THE WORLD THEATER

The urge to celebrate is understandable. Once the World was simply a place to do shows. Now it's a showplace. Combining the latest sound and broadcast systems with all the trappings of an elegant performing space, the facilities were designed for maximum versatility. Although the theater's principal resident will be "A Prairie Home Companion," it will book an eclectic performance schedule of concerts, dance and theater productions and film screenings.

Refurbishing the 925-seat theater was an ambitious undertaking. The 76-year-old vaudeville house is St. Paul's oldest surviving stage, and had been deteriorating for decades. It was closed in 1984 when ceiling plaster began bombarding "A Prairie Home Companion" audiences.

Restoration was originally budgeted at \$1.5 million, but that figure was soon lost beneath an avalanche of sawdust. The remodeling grew to encompass every aspect of the dilapidated building from plumbing, stage rigging, painting and electrical wiring to construction of a new marquee. The final tally is \$3.5 million — about 20 times the theater's original construction cost. According to Alison Circle of Minnesota Public Radio, the World's parent corporation, \$2.5 million of that has been raised so far from various sources.

Two teams of architects undertook a complete restoration of the facade and rebuilding of the interior. Miller Hanson Westerbeck Bell Architects of Minneapolis restored the exterior; Conrad Schmitt Studios of Milwaukee designed the interior.

The entrance, at 10 Exchange St., features a

## WORLD: No seat is more than 87 feet from stage

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glass-enclosed three-story atrium in the form of an oversized greenhouse. The auditorium itself boasts ornate plasterwork and gold-leaf detailing. But instead of a formal, recital-hall atmosphere, the interior aims at intimacy between audience and performers. No seat in the theater is more than 87 feet from the stage, and sight lines are excellent from all directions.

Tonight's opening begins a week-long celebration of the World's rejuvenation. The events are as follows:

**Today:** "A Prairie Home Companion" benefit gala. The theater officially opens with a special nonbroadcast version of the popular radio show; the \$150-a-person evening includes a cocktail reception, the show and dinner at the Science Museum. The menu includes Red Jell-O Aspic as served at the Chatterbox Café, Ralph's Green Salad with greens from the Pretty Good Gro-

cery, Chicken Clarence with vegetables from Ariene Bunsen's garden and Potatoes Doreen. (Some tickets are still available; for more information on any events, call the World Theater Hotline at 221-1535.)

**Saturday:** National TV debut of "A Prairie Home Companion." The radio show will begin at 5 p.m., its regular time. The TV broadcast will be carried by the Public Broadcasting Service at 8 p.m. local time Saturday. Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) will repeat the 5 p.m. broadcast and simulcast with the TV program. The show also will be broadcast on the Disney Channel cable network as a Fourth of July special.

**Sunday:** World Theater open house and block party. Exchange St. will be closed in front of the theater for a public shindig. MPR promises no boring speeches about what a great day this is for the community, etc. Guided theater tours will be offered from 1 to 2:30 p.m., and curious shy people will be allowed to poke

around the theater by themselves. Folksingers Dale Dahlquist and Clint Hoover, the Elizabethan Syngers and the bluegrass band Rolling Green will perform onstage. Live entertainment outdoors: a street filled with food carts, vendors and roving balloon sculptors, jugglers, portrait artists and mimes.

**Monday:** No activities scheduled.

**Tuesday:** Duck's Breath Mystery Theater. The comedy troupe is best known for its "Ask Dr. Science" spots on MPR's "The Morning Show," and for Ian Scholes' acerbic social commentary on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" and ABC-TV's "Nightline." It will perform at 7 and 9:30 p.m.

**Wednesday:** The Schubert Club features "Minnesota's Finest" in an 8 p.m. classical concert program featuring the Dale Warland Chamber Singers, pianist Paul Schoenfeld with violinist Young Nam Kim and mezzo-soprano Janis Hardy singing

Dominick Argento's "Diary of Virginia Woolf," accompanied by pianist Philip Brunelle.

**Thursday:** Doc Watson in concert. Virtuoso acoustic guitarist and folksinger Watson, whom Time magazine called "the Segovia of country music," performs at 7 p.m. St. Paul's Pat Donohue, 1983 national finger picking champion, will open the show.

**Friday, May 2:** Rivertown International Film Festival. The festival will run through May 10, offering premieres, children's shows, festival favorites and special guests. "A Great Wall," the first co-production between American and mainland Chinese filmmakers, will be shown at 8 p.m. Friday. The film is a comedy about a Chinese-American family returning to Peking after a 30-year absence. The film's director and star, Peter Wang, will be on hand.