

More cheers than tears for next-to-last show

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Humorist Garrison Keillor told a benefit audience he wanted everyone "prostrate on the floor" with grief, but the tears were few as "A Prairie Home Companion" came down to its last night on the air.

The popular public radio program closes a 13-year run tonight with a last two-hour — or maybe a bit longer — broadcast from the World Theater and a last report of a quiet week in Keillor's mythical hometown, Lake Wobegon.

American Public Radio plans to keep the show going for another year, however, by repeating old shows.

"I'm counting on you to show proper, decent grief," said Keillor, who was tieless in a formal shirt, suspenders and dark slacks.

Despite such pleas, he kept it light during most of Friday night's \$150-a-ticket benefit, which drew a capacity audience of 1,000 adoring fans from both coasts as well as Minnesota.

"I'm going to miss baseball, I'm going to miss barbecues, I'm going to miss The New York Times," said the 44-year-old author, who is moving to his wife's native Denmark. "After a while, I'll even miss USA Today.

"But mostly, I'll miss these songs, these great songs."

The selection was typically diverse: "Rock of Ages" and "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louie" blended with one of Keillor's own gently bouncing songs about a boyhood ride on a hayrack.

Guitarists Chet Atkins and Leo Kottke, Stevie Beck, invariably introduced as "the queen of the autoharp," and Scottish singer Jean Redpath — all well-known to fans of the show — joined Keillor.

Tenor Vern Sutton, who sang "The Stars and Stripes Forever" on the first weekly broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" on July

6, 1974 for an audience of 12, was there to sing the same song, and a set of farewell songs set to the music of Handel.

It was in the music that Keillor came closest to emotion, especially in "A Fool Such as I," the last song before the encores.

"Pardon me if I'm sentimental, when we say goodbye, don't be angry with me should I cry," Keillor sang in his warm but unsteady baritone. A few sniffles could be heard in the audience.

"It hasn't been weepy yet, but lumps in the throat do occur," Sutton said as a champagne reception continued into the wee hours this morning.

Keillor, who has complained of the burdens of being one of four celebrities in St. Paul — the others being the governor, the mayor and the TV weatherman — patiently signed autographs for two hours, never moving from the spot where he had been surrounded by fans.

Keillor's report from Lake Wobegon told of a rainy Wednesday morning, and how the weather affected some of the town's familiar characters. For the Norwegian bachelor farmers, Keillor said, it brought hope of a good crop, and another year of avoiding the necessity of marriage.

"A Prairie Home Companion" bows out as the most popular entertainment program in public radio, with an estimated weekly audience of 4 million.

Lottery numbers

Here are the lottery numbers drawn Friday in three neighboring states:

OHIO

The Number — 567.

Pick Four — 7711.

MICHIGAN

Daily Game — 338.

Daily Four — 7574.

ILLINOIS

Daily Game — 717.

Pick Four — 1602.