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## Keillor burns no bridges in 'Prairie Home' finale

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Garrison Keillor burned no bridges as he left "A Prairie Home Companion" to take up the life of a "tall, silent person" in Denmark.

When they were last heard on Saturday, Buster the Showdog had begun a new adventure on a southbound freight, accompanied by Father Finnian, Sheila the Christian Jungle Girl and Timmy, the sad, rich teen-ager.

The Norwegian bachelor farmers were crammed into a booth at the Chatterbox Cafe in Lake Wobegon, whiling away a rainy day which brought hope for another good crop.

"If you see them before I do, give them my best," Keillor said in his last report of a quiet week in the little town, "and tell them I think of them."

Keillor joked about grief and playfully dabbed the solemn face of guitarist Chet Atkins with a hanky, but he kept a smile through one sad old song after another on the final broadcast, which ran nearly half an hour overtime. Even then, the 1,000 people who filled the old World Theater had to have one more song before letting him go.

"We'll see you in a few years, when Garrison comes back," St. Paul Mayor George Latimer said after launching 10,000 balloons into the air over the theater, where the show had originated since 1978.

"A Prairie Home Companion" will live on through repeats on American Public Radio, the Minnesota-based public radio network which grew

up with the show. Keillor has given no hint that he intends to return: he left the show, he has said, so that he could devote more attention to his writing.

He's at work on a film script based on "Lake Wobegon Days," his best-selling novel, and on a second book.

Keillor insisted he would miss the 4 million people who tune in every week more than they would miss him.

"There are a lot of funnier people around, and a lot of better singers," he said. "I know you're going to find another show, but you're my only audience."

"We don't know what he is going to do, other than go over there and write," said tenor Vern Jitton, who was on the first weekly broadcast in 1974 and was there for the last, singing "Stars and Stripes Forever" on both occasions.

To the end, "A Prairie Home Companion" was Keillor's show, reflecting his diverse and sometimes cornball musical tastes and his affection for small-town life.

"This week he asked if I had any ideas for the show," said Kate MacKenzie, a bluegrass guitarist and singer who also plays Sheila. "What he came up with is nothing anybody suggested."

Crew members said it had been an emotional week.

"There have been tears, lots of tears," said associate producer Helen Edinger.

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RADIO HOST Garrison Keillor conducts the audience in a sing-along version of "Tell My Why" during the final broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion." (AP Photo)

Keillor ended the show on a note of reconciliation, bringing out producer Margaret Moos for a bow. He had dedicated "Lake Wobegon Days" to her, but four months after the book came out, he married an old high school classmate, exchange student Ulla Skaerved of Denmark.

Moos left the show, but returned as producer for the final 13 weeks when "A Prairie Home Companion" was on cable television as well as on radio.

Coming back, she told the weekly Twin Cities Reader, was "a great gift," a chance "to join in the last hurrah."