

Keillor may go, but World won't end

St. Paul theater 'Prairie Home Companion' helped save is managed by ex-Iowan Schultz



The renovated World Theater will continue with a variety of attractions, including silent movies.

By GENE RAFFENSPERGER
Register Staff Writer

Saturday night, from the stage of the World Theater in downtown St. Paul, Minn., Garrison Keillor will do his last "Prairie Home Companion" radio broadcast.

Doubtless, few in the theater audience, or many in the estimated 4 million listening at home, will be dry-eyed when Keillor reaches the end of his monologue and says:

"That's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, all the men good looking and all the children above average."

That'll be it for Keillor. No more Powdermilk biscuits, no more Pastor Ingqvist, no more Sidetrack Tap. A wrap on a 13-year career that saw him put together the most successful program in the history of public radio.

The show's demise has drawn so much attention that press representatives from New York, London, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., will be on hand for the final night's coverage.

Let there be light

So what about the World Theater, longtime home for the famous show? Will it go dark without "Prairie Home Companion"? Will there be life on East Exchange Street in St. Paul after Keillor leaves for Denmark?

Of course the World will not go dark. And of course there will be audiences and shows. And a former Iowan will be in charge of keeping the lights blazing.

In fact, Marilyn Schultz, the theater's managing director, has booked a variety of attractions for this summer, ranging from the Minneapolis Chamber Symphony to the Butch Thompson Trio to programs of silent movies with accompanying music from the World's Mighty Wurlitzer organ.

As Schultz, a native of Davenport, Ia., points out, the World Theater never has been only the home for "Prairie Home Companion." It has just seemed that way because of word association — Keillor, Lake Wobegon, World Theater.

Concerts, choirs and even some corporate affairs have been held in the World on the days other than Saturday, which since 1978 — except during the theater's recent renovation — has been "Prairie Home Companion" night. Schultz says that sort of schedule will continue.



Marilyn Schultz
World Theater director

By late this year, says Schultz, she hopes World Theater audiences will be enjoying a new public radio program hosted by Noah Adams.

Schultz plans to be in the audience at the World Saturday night for Keillor's final show. She acknowledges she is a fan of both Keillor and the show, so she may be as misty-eyed as the others.

But she knows the program's actual demise will never put her and the World's staff through the wringer they survived last winter when Keillor announced on the air one Saturday evening that the show would end after the June 13 performance.

Avalanche of requests

The World seats 915. "Prairie Home Companion's" popularity generated from 2,000 to 3,000 requests for tickets for every week's show. So even before Keillor announced the show would close, the business of assigning seats was done by lottery, with members of Minnesota Public Radio given priority. Keillor's announcement unleashed an avalanche.

"In the next five working days we had 27,000 telephone calls asking for tickets to the show," says Schultz. "We had 20,000 pieces of mail in the same period."

The result was inevitable. Thousands were disappointed, and it saddened them.

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Keillor leaves his little house on prairie

By JOANNE OSTROW
Staff Writer

What will Garrison Keillor's listeners miss most when the town of Lake Wobegon, Minn., goes into reruns?

At the top of the list are the more-or-less extemporaneous "News From Lake Wobegon" monologues.

Then the commercials for the Powdermilk Biscuit Company, Bertha's Kitty Boutique and Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery. Also Butch Thompson at the piano, the gentle Scottish folk songs of Jean Redpath and the congratulatory birth and graduation announcements.

"A Prairie Home Companion," the folksy two-hour radio variety show that 4 million listeners enjoy each week live from St. Paul, Minn., will cease production Saturday.

While it lasted, the show revived a radio format that had almost disappeared with Fred Allen, Jack Benny and Bing Crosby's "Kraft Music Hall." The closest surviving relative is The Grand Ole Opry, which inspired Keillor to create his show.

The show, the last, will be presented at 5 p.m. Saturday by National Public Radio, with a tape-delayed television version shown at 8 p.m. on the Disney cable channel. Some Iowa

public radio stations will repeat the show on Sunday.)

Each weekend for 13 years, Keillor's voice seemed to emanate from a forgotten time and place. Slowly and innocently, he told homespun stories in a seemingly effortless stream, offering quaintness in a high-tech age.

His preacher-like tones could be lulling, inviting us to join him in a sympathetic look at what it is like to be human. We leaned close to catch his near-whispers, we followed him to his crescendo and we went away with a chuckle.

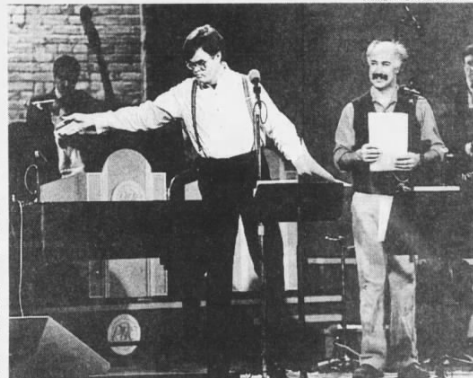
He aimed for chuckles, not belly laughs, and won us over through place names, character names and grand observations on the tiniest of life's absurdities. He spoke for everyone who ever lived in a Lake Wobegon, or ever wished to.

And while the music and the stories were mostly by and about rural folks, the show's appeal reached well beyond the heartland. More than a few urbanites in the media have likened Keillor to Mark Twain.

Saturday's guests will include Redpath, country legend Chet Atkins.

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Garrison Keillor (left) will leave his audience in a state of suspender animation.

History of Carl Cicada

COMMENTARY

— according to the papers — an entomologist had scarfed up cicadas. They were chanting:
"Hey, hey, DOA, how many bugs did you eat today?"

I had to look closely to read their little picket signs, which said: "Buzz off, Department of Agriculture," "Don't Bug Us!" and, "A plague of locusts up on thee and thy house!"

"Mr. Cicada," I said to the apparent leader of the pickets, "can we talk?"
"Call me Carl," he said. "I'm only, like, you know, 17."

"OK, Carl," I said, "what's this all about?"
"How would you like to spend your whole life, like, underground, emerge into the real world and, you know, finally have a chance to get it on with a chick, then have some entomologist use you for a canape?"

"Well," I said, "some cultures do use bugs as food. Even the Bible said, 'And his meat was locusts ...' Matthew 3:4."

"Yeah, but in a country that can produce, like, salad bars and Big Macs you'd think folks would think twice before eating bugs. We crunch, you know."

"What did you cicadas do to pass the time while you were underground, Carl?"

"Oh, you know — TV, scooping the

loop, hanging out. And naps. We took lots of naps."

"Any problems while growing up from nymph to cicada?"

"Zits," he said. "You know, you get to be 12 or 13 and the zits take over. Talk about your pizza-face nymph. And I was skinny and shy and nobody liked me and I always got picked last when we chose up sides for Larvae, Larvae, Who's Got the Larvae."

"Girls were a problem, too. Couldn't get a kiss. Couldn't even moisten a mandible. I was shy. Wore braces. Couldn't dance."

"I notice you have orange legs."

"They're my pants," he said. "Baggy orange jeans are in this year. And dig the pink high-top Reeboks and my aviator shades."

"Say," I said, as he took off the glasses, "you have five red eyes."

"The better to ogle nymphs with, now that I got soft contacts. But the P's — that's parents to you — had a fit when I dropped two lenses down the sink."

He began to edge away.

"Sorry," he said. "Got to run, or, you know, like, fly. I've only got three weeks to — koff-koff — score. Then it's off to suck sap from that big magnolia tree in the sky."

"Wait," I called as he began to rev up his buzz-saw mating call. "As a typical 17-year-old cicada, what was the first thing you said when you finally emerged from underground?"

"I said, 'Dad, can I have the car keys?'"

For just \$225 you can freeze-dry your kitty cat

ANN LANDERS

DEAR ANN LANDERS: This is for a woman who wrote about the death of her adorable 14-year-old cat, "Chow Chow." He ate some house plants that were toxic and died. Had I known where to reach the lady I would have given her a call and told her that Chow Chow could have been freeze-dried and kept forever.

Yes, it's true. Many people are doing this now. Anyone who is interested should call (501) 731-2904 and get the details.

— Your Friend in Arkansas ANN LANDERS SAYS: I was interested and called the number you suggested. I reached Larry R. Winston, one of the owners of Cache River Taxidermy.

Larry told me that freeze-drying involves the removing of all moisture from the tissues of the animal so the cells are not destroyed and the body doesn't collapse. This is done by machine. The finished product is sometimes painted.

This procedure can be performed on any pet. The most common subjects are dogs and cats. A medium-size cat is \$225 (kittens, \$175). They also do squirrels, beavers, mink, snakes and bullfrogs. No skunks, please.

DEAR ANN LANDERS: Dad is 80 years old, a successful businessman with a great sense of humor. He is an all-around wonderful person.

The problem is his driving. He runs stop signs, stops when there are no signs, never checks his mirror when he changes lanes and goes the wrong di-

rection on one-way streets. Dad gets cantankerous when any of us insist on driving. He resents the aging process, but who doesn't?

I called his doctor a few weeks ago, explained the problem and asked if he would please phone Dad and tell him it wasn't in his best interest to drive anymore.

The doctor was reluctant to make the call, knowing Dad's temperament, but when I told him about a near-miss that could have killed a car full of kids he agreed. Well, Dad got terribly angry and is now going to another doctor.

My sister and I have children who love their grandfather. We want them to have this dear man in their lives for as many years as possible, and we want him in our lives, too. We are all convinced that he will live longer if the car keys are taken out of his hands for good. Please tell us what to do.

— Worried Wanda in California ANN LANDERS SAYS: At first blush this may sound like a dirty trick, but considering the circumstances I believe it is warranted.

Go to the police station nearest your father's home. Explain the situation as you have explained it to me, or better still, take this column along and say, "I wrote this letter."

Ask the officer in charge if he will have someone tail Gramps. If the dear man is as lousy a driver as you say, he will be stopped for a ticket in no time.

When the police see that he is a menace to society, they will have his license taken away. To get it back, he will have to pass a driver's test. That should make a passenger out of him for good.

DEAR READERS: Several weeks ago I printed a poem about a lad who was humiliated when he struck out in a Little League baseball game. I didn't know the author of that poem titled, "He's Just a Little Boy," but Donald Boomershine of Birmingham, Ala., did. So did dozens of other folks. It's Bob Fox.

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Most dangerous road travel occurs at night in rural area

The National Safety Council reports three times as many people die in nighttime motor-vehicle collisions as die during daytime motor-vehicle accidents. Moreover, death rates in rural areas are more than twice what they are in urban areas.

Keillor's replacement in the wings

KEILLOR

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acoustic guitarist Leo Kottke, pianist-organist-conductor Philip Brunelle and Hawaii's Kamehameha Glee Club.

Keillor talked publicly about leaving almost a year ago, but he still took some in his radio audience by surprise when he announced on the air in February that he would leave his show to devote full time to writing in his wife's native Denmark.

"I want to resume the life of a shy person," Keillor said, "a life in which there are Saturdays." It was a "simple, painful decision that is cheerfully made," he observed on the show, which has been heard live on 275 public radio stations.

The Saturday night variety show slated to succeed "A Prairie Home Companion" is "in the earliest stages of development," Minnesota Public Radio spokeswoman Chris Lenger said.

It will be hosted by Noah Adams, formerly of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." Two holiday specials have been scheduled for the Adams show, Nov. 21 and Dec. 19, in advance of its national debut Jan. 9.

Last summer, Keillor, 44, said he looked forward to retiring to a place where they do not speak English.

"It relieves you of any responsibility to be intelligent," he said. "You can just be handsome for a change."

He offered advice, too. "Everybody ought to have Denmark as a possibility out there in the future, whenever you might need it."

And what would he take to Denmark?

"Two hundred pounds of books to get me through the first two years, a popcorn popper, a lot of angel food cake mix ..."

After Saturday, reruns from Keillor's early shows previously heard only in Minnesota will be offered to public radio stations nationally, mixed with a compilation of "best of" tapes.

In addition, Walt Disney Home Video will release a series of Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" performances on video, beginning with the final show.

ILLINOIS LOTTERY

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. (AP) — Here are the winning numbers selected Thursday in the Illinois State Lottery.
Daily Game: 4-8-3
Pick Four: 8-7-6-5
Lotto jackpot: \$7.5 million

Fund drive saved 'Prairie' theater

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dened Schultz and her staff. "We get in this business to make people happy, so the hardest thing to do is to say no. Yet we spent the bulk of the spring disappointing people," she recalls.

The show's immense success leaves Schultz with a somewhat ironic problem. Some people may hear the words "World Theater" and say, "isn't that where 'Prairie Home Companion' played, and isn't it hard to get tickets there?"

Schultz aims to overcome that difficulty with top-quality programs and skillful promotion.

Certainly the physical appearance of the World Theater will help. The World is 77 years old, but a \$3.5 million face-lift has given the place back

its youth.

Located in the heart of downtown St. Paul, the World began as a theatrical house. A movie screen was added in the 1920s. At its low point, the theater hosted "B" movies.

By 1977, the World was down at the heels, its paint peeling, carpeting frayed, seats in bad shape. Owners called for the wrecking ball. The World Theater would be leveled and replaced by a parking lot.

But "Prairie Home Companion" moved in during 1978 and began to fill the place. Minnesota Public Radio, which bought the building in 1980, mounted a fund drive that raised \$3.5 million. That money fixed up the structural problems, plus put the sound and lighting systems on a par with the best in theaters anywhere.

In addition, the Mighty Wurlitzer organ in the Texas Theater in San An-

tonio was installed at the World. Today, it presents a spectacle of both sound and sight as it is played while rising on a platform from the orchestra pit.

Schultz, 33, brings a mixture of talent in business and the arts to her job. She has an undergraduate degree from the University of Iowa and a master's degree in business administration from the University of North-ern Iowa.

After that, her interest in the arts took her to jobs with the Iowa State Center at Ames and the Ordway Theater in Minneapolis. She took over as director of the World Theater in early 1986.

Schultz is a cellist, but instead of performing from the stage, she sees that performances are well staged. "I think I have more enthusiasm than talent in the arts," she says.