



File photo

Garrison Keillor will "sing" his farewell song on Saturday's "Prairie Home Companion."

Garrison Keillor

Fan remembers getting hooked

By PHIL MURRAY
Staff Writer

Saturday night, Garrison Keillor will host the final performance of "A Prairie Home Companion," and that burning question finally will be answered: Will Buster the Show Dog, Timmy, Father Finian and Sheila the Christian jungle girl find the cathedral in downtown St. Paul?

The intrepid foursome has survived sinking ships, crashing cars and, most recently, a dangling cable car, only to find themselves lost in the city where Keillor has performed the popular live radio show for 13 years.

I'm betting they'll find it, but you never know in this spoof of a radio adventure series. I know what a problem they have. I went to the World Theater last fall with a friend in Minneapolis who, over the past several years, had never found an excuse to venture into the neighboring twin city. Fortunately, we stumbled across a science museum right across from the World Theater.

The first time I heard Minnesota Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion" was when I was in high school. I had a friend whose father listened to the show religiously. He would sit in this big wing chair right beside the stereo, listening, his eyes focused on nothing in particular.

From 6 to 8 on Saturday nights, when the show was on, there was just no talking to him.

"We won't be out late," I would say.

"Hrrmph," he would say.

"We're just going to go buy a few six-packs and ride around town for awhile at unsafe speeds."

"Hrrmph."

Once I ran into him at a party after a wedding. He was out in the garage near the keg, sitting in a lawn chair, listening to Keillor. At the time, I didn't understand the fascination, and I chalked it up to middle age.

I lost touch with the show until a few years ago, when I chanced across one of Keillor's famous monologues while searching for a different radio station. By

• Please see Keillor, Page D2

• Keillor

Continued from Page D1
that time, he had attained some considerable personal fame, and his shows, a combination of gospel singing, country music, jazz, folk, poetry and storytelling, had somehow become popular.

I was curious, so I listened. Keillor was talking about the fictitious Minnesota town of Lake Wobegon, population 942, the subject of his monologue every week. Told by Keillor, the stories are often funny, sometimes sad, but always full of love.

Keillor's deep, resonant voice is unmistakable, distinctive as his breathing, which is as audible on the radio as it is in the World Theater.

I'm told that Keillor often writes his monologue the morning of the show, but he performs it without any notes. I have the impression that even he doesn't know how the story will end.

Now he's leaving. Shortly after the last show, he will

move to Copenhagen with his new wife, who was his high school classmate in Anoka, Minn.

Keillor wants to be anonymous again, to observe with impunity the ordinary people who are the subjects of his stories. As he said on a recent show, "I want to enjoy the sweet life I describe in my stories."

He compared his departure to Lake Wobegon resident Bob Bowser's '55 Merc behind the garage. It had been sitting there so many years that two box elders had grown up through the floorboard into the front seat, where Bob and his wife Bonnie had sat while they dated.

This spring, Bob finally had to get rid of the Merc. His eyes were all misty, thinking of the romance left behind.

The final performance of "A Prairie Home Companion" will be televised on the Disney Channel. But I think I'll just listen.