



AP photo
Radio host Garrison Keillor conducts the audience Saturday in a sing-along during the final performance of his "Prairie Home Companion" radio show.

Mist over Wobegon Keillor gives last performance

ST. PAUL (AP) — Garrison Keillor's imaginary hometown of Lake Wobegon has been left to fade into a mist compounded of a spring morning's rain and the tears of parting.

"A Prairie Home Companion" played to one last full house Saturday night before Keillor moves on to a new life in Denmark, his wife's native land.

"Tonight is our last broadcast," Keillor said before his show, which ran 28 minutes overtime and continued for several more minutes after leaving the air.

"It's amazing that it turns out to be the easiest. We had so much fun this week."

The homey humorist opened the show with his customary low-key musical numbers and said, "I'm going to miss you a lot more than you're going to miss me. That's just the fact of it."

Keillor said he would not have an audience in Denmark.

"I'm not humorous there," he said. "I'm a tall, very quiet person who keeps saying the same things over and over again 'cause that's all I know."

Keillor closed the show with a series of sentimental songs, interrupted by frequent laughter and calls of the loon, Minnesota's state bird.

During one of his last curtain calls, Keillor brought out Margaret Moos, the show's long-time producer and the woman to whom Keillor had dedicated his book, "Lake Wobegon Days."

A month after the book was released, Keillor married an old high school classmate from Denmark, and

Moos left the show. She returned to produce the final 13 weeks.

There were few tears in the audience, but for the crew "the tears started three weeks ago," said Helen Edinger, an associate producer of the show.

"Tonight is going to be ours," she said.

Dozens of ticketless fans withstood 90-degree temperatures before the show in the hopes of finding a way to view the last telling of Lake Wobegon tales in person. And the show's staff members were having their own problems saying goodbye.

On Saturday morning, as the cast unwound at a champagne reception following a \$150-a-ticket benefit performance, tenor Vern Sutton said, "It hasn't been weepy yet, but lumps in the throat do occur."

"There was a lot of nostalgia as we put it together," said Sutton, who sang on the first of the weekly broadcasts on June 6, 1974, before an audience of 12.

The lineup for Saturday's final show included guitarists Chet Atkins and Leo Kottke, "queen of the auto-harp" Stevie Beck, Scottish singer Jean Redpath and the Kamehameha Schools Glee Club from Honolulu.

The musical mix reflected Keillor's unique ability to be both clown and moralist, mixing sometimes earthy tales with devout renditions of hymns.

Keillor joked Friday night that he wanted his audience "prostrate on the floor" with grief as he ended 13 years on radio, but the 44-year-old writer and raconteur looked mostly on the funny side of farewell.