

on the pact.



**Return to Lake Wobegon mix of comic, poignant**

By Kent M. Shaw  
Free Press Correspondent

MIDDLEBURY — Mostly, the news from Lake Wobegon is pretty good.

It still being May, no, Lyle probably hasn't gotten his storm windows down yet — with or without Carl's help. Lyle's not too happy with the prospect of subjecting his family to bitter Canadian drafts.

But the Lutheran ministers have learned a thing or two about the perils of swamping Wally's pontoon boat.

It's been a long while since the news has been heard from that mythic little Minnesota town, where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.

Garrison Keillor, who hosted Prairie Home Companion for 13 years, brought all the news — such as it was — and two hours of beguiling entertainment to Middlebury College for three performances

Friday and Saturday. Keillor and his nine-member ensemble got a thunderous standing ovation from the Mead Chapel audience for their efforts at the close of Saturday's 4 p.m. matinee.

"You look good," Keillor said after almost a year away from the weekly Prairie Home tradition.

"People told me you put on weight, but you didn't. You look good. I like your hair.

"Since I've been gone, I'm sure you've found any number of radio programs better than mine, but there's never been any radio audience for me since you.

"You kind of play around with the dial. I'm a one-audience kind of guy."

Like any edition of the famed program, this one was impossible to squeeze into any category, a mix of moments comic and poignant, with music that roamed from the misty Blue Mountains of

**Turn to RETURN, back page**

TOBY TALBOT, The Associated Press

**KEILLOR RETURNS:** Garrison Keillor, in his first return performance of Prairie Home Companion, performs before an audience at Middlebury College Friday night.

treaty Reagan and Gorbachev signed last choose" in the Soviet Union.

## Return to Lake Wobegon mix of comic, poignant

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Virginia to the glitz and glitter of Broadway.

It was all about farewells, the 2nd Annual Farewell Performance was, most noticeably Keillor's own farewell last June to his native St. Paul.

He endured a songful of self-inflicted barbs about his decision to live for three months in Copenhagen, Denmark, where his wife of 2½ years is a native.

His subsequent and well-publicized decision to return to the United States to live in New York City was the grist for most of the show's obvious thematic side.

But there was always the music.

Butch Thompson, a consummate ragtime and stride pianist who has graced the Prairie Home stage since its debut, could have disappointed no one.

In a comic segment where Keillor appealed for ultimate brevity of showmanship — with the audience responding with a single, simultaneous clap — Thompson gleefully reduced the Minute Waltz to about eight seconds, give or take.

Thompson's rendition of "How Long Blues," to open the second set, showed how good and how spare a concert grand piano can sound.

Credit here and throughout a wondrous bit of wiring from the audio crew, who have mastered the acoustic challenges of Mead Chapel.

Broadway's veteran Karen Morrow brought a strong lift to all the New York City material, light-hearted and otherwise.

Morrow's contribution to the super-short performance skit — the funniest of the bunch — was a vampy blues take-off that went "Another Mr. Right just left, and now I've got the ambidextrous blues."

Vocals from singers Kate MacKenzie and Robin and Linda Williams, especially

when they took on some solid three-part and — with Keillor singing bass — four-part harmonies, were stunning.

For a lot of the audience, the performers' forays into traditional country and gospel were probably keen reminders that there is a lot of fine music we seem to forget about, the more so since the end of the Prairie Home Companion.

Keillor is gingerly ambiguous about his feelings toward life in Manhattan, and about the future of Prairie Home, too.

His venture into the city has not, he says, necessarily made for reams of new material, although his appearances in *The New Yorker* magazine seem to be on the increase.

"There's a lot of human scenery in New York," Keillor said Friday. "But it's almost too much to write about."

Would another Annual Farewell Performance be in the offing?

"A third? A fourth? It does seem odd," he said. "I guess we'll have to go away and see what it feels like."

He said he hoped to be able to take his family back to Denmark this summer, and following this tour, begin planning a Christmas special to be filmed there and broadcast by the Disney Channel.

"Scandinavia becomes briefly ecstatic for part of June and July, and then it starts to rain again. But I don't want to lose my hold on Denmark."

There was ample seating for the matinee, with about 150 tickets going unsold. Fans who lined up hours before tickets went on sale for the added show were chagrined to see latecomers find seats.

Keillor's tour carries on from Vermont for performances in Worcester, Mass., and New York's Radio City Music Hall.

The 8 p.m. performance June 4 from New York will be broadcast live over the American Public Radio Network and carried on a Disney Channel cablecast.