

# New York laps at shores of Keillor's Lake Wobegon

MIDDLEBURY, Vt. (AP) — The folks in Lake Wobegon must be wondering what in the world has gotten into that boy. Garrison Keillor has taken to the city.

"A Prairie Home Companion," the most popular show on public radio, is back. But the endless cornfields are shadowed by skyscrapers and all those bachelor farmers are rubbing elbows with the homeless.

One year after it ended its 13-year run, Keillor's uniquely personal show will be broadcast Saturday from New York's Radio City Music Hall, miles and worlds apart from its former home in Minnesota.

The new farewell show will be broadcast on American Public Radio and the Disney television channel at 7 p.m.

While the new show finds Keillor still fantasizing about Lake Wobegon, his little town that time forgot, it reflects his fascination with his new home, New York City.

The new show, a one-time special being called "The 2nd Annual Farewell Performance," made its debut this weekend at Middlebury College before audiences hungry for news from Lake Wobegon.

When his faithful radio audience last heard from Keillor, it was June 13, 1987. The nation's most famous shy person was saying farewell to "A Prairie Home Companion," the eclectic mix of music and wit that he developed and which had been broadcast live from St. Paul for 13 years.

"It simply is time to go," he said, detailing his plans to move to his wife's country of Denmark and return to writing.

Keillor's move to Denmark, though, lasted only a few months: He found it difficult to live in a land so foreign, with his limited ability to speak a language with those "strange words that sound like singing birds."

Keillor, very simply, became homesick. He told his Middlebury audience this weekend that he would see "those sweet, sweet pictures of the USA" and "I would miss my hometown. It's become a paradise ever since I've moved



Garrison Keillor  
At home in New York  
away."

But upon returning to the United States, Keillor opted against moving back to the Minnesota that had provided his roots and the show's foundation. Instead he headed to the Big Apple.

While his new show still is peppered with commercials from those familiar places and familiar faces in Lake Wobegon, like the Chatterbox Cafe, "where the coffeepot is always on, which is why it tastes that way," it is clear this chronicler of rural life is smitten with city ways.

"New York is the strangest city I've ever seen," he told his Middlebury audience, conceding, though, "I like New York a lot."

His fascination with the city shows up in "The Adventures of Buster the Show Dog," a regular fixture on the old program. The latest installment finds Buster lost in Manhattan, as Buster's owners fight through the grime and step over the homeless to find their pet, asking New Yorkers, "How come you have to be so rude all the time."

Keillor fans, take heart, though. A Prairie Home preoccupied with New York is just as riveting as one wandering through Wobegon.

Keillor's rich, velvety voice, perfect timing and wonderful sense of innocence and perception, make him one of the country's top entertainers, whether

he is stalled in a subway or describing Wobegon's dog days of August.

Although Keillor himself said Friday he was rustier than he thought following his year away, it was clear his wit remains sharp.

Some Keillorisms:

■ Squinting at the audience after the opening of the show, he said, "People had told me you'd put on weight. I don't think you have."

■ He described the month of March as "the month God designed to show people who don't drink what a hang-over is like."

■ He urged a one-year moratorium on publishing to give people time to read what's already been written. He suggested creation of a federal prose stabilization program "to pay us writers not to write" during that year.

Following Friday's Prairie Home performance, his first since saying farewell a year ago, Keillor said he was surprised at how hard it had been to do the show. "I forget how I used to do these things," he said.

Asked whether New York now felt like home, he said, "Yes, it does. I didn't realize that until I flew out to Minnesota recently."

Keillor said he does not have any plans to return Prairie Home to weekly broadcasts, but does plan to continue annual farewell shows every June. He does not plan to do any of those at his old home of the World Theater, though. "I don't think one can ever go back."

What is very clear from Keillor's return to radio is that he was telling the truth in his farewell performance a year ago when he said, "I'm going to miss you alot more than you're going to miss me."

There is no doubt he has been missed, but neither is there any doubt he has truly missed his show.

As he began the second annual farewell performance, dressed in a tuxedo with his trademark red suspenders, his opening theme song "Hello, love" spoke volumes:

"I've missed you so since I've been gone. You're back with me. My world is complete. Hello, love."