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'Prairie Home Companion' to say farewell - again

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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 coming back, temporarily. But the endless cornfields are shadowed by skyscrapers and all those Norwegian 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 next Saturday from New York's Radio City Music Hall, miles and worlds apart from its former home in Minnesota.

And while the new show finds Keillor still fantasizing about Lake Wobegon, the 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 Second Annual Farewell Performance," made its non-broadcast debut with three performances this weekend at Middlebury College. There will also be three shows in New York, including the Saturday show that is to be on radio and cable television.

When his faithful 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," his eclectic mix of music and wit that had been broadcast live from St. Paul, Minn.

"It simply is time to go," he had said, detailing his plans to move to his wife's native country, 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. He told his Middlebury audience Friday 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 away."

However, Keillor opted against moving back to Minnesota. Instead, he headed to the Big Apple.

While his new show is still peppered with commercials from those familiar faces and familiar places, like Lake Wobegon's 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.

His fascination with New York 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 his owners fight through grime and step over the homeless to find their pet, asking New Yorkers, "How come you have to be so rude all the time?"



Garrison Keillor

Although Keillor himself said Friday he was rustier than he thought after a 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 hangover is like."

Asked whether New York now

felt like home, he said after Friday's performance: "Yes, it does. I didn't realize that until I flew out to Minnesota recently."

The new farewell show will be broadcast on American Public Radio and the Disney television channel at 8 p.m. Saturday.