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## Keillor returns to rural Minnesota roots in new radio show

It has been a quiet Thanksgiving in Lake Wobegon. Everybody said "Amen" and ate too much from a table that looked like it had slipped away unnoticed from a Norman Rockwell painting. Somebody burped. Somebody yawned. Then it was time for dessert.

On the second round of pumpkin pie somebody mentioned the Keillor kid. The tall one named Garrison. The one who ran away from home. Made a name for himself on radio. Had millions of people listening to him every Saturday night on his live old-time variety show, *A Prairie Home Companion*. Sold lots of books, too. Got his face on the cover of *Time*. Then he ran away from all that. Closed the show in 1987, he did. High-tailed it to Denmark. Didn't stay long. Went to New York City, I hear. Wonder what he's doing?



Cliff Radel

"Right now I'm sitting at home, trying to write about Thanksgiving and Halloween in Lake Wobegon," Keillor says by phone. Outside his window is the sound of traffic. Inside, he's working at his word processor before heading to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to rehearse his new radio show.

It starts Saturday at 6 p.m. Same time as *A Prairie Home Companion*. Same station: WGUC-FM (90.9 MHz). New title's a mouthful: *Garrison Keillor's American Radio Company of the Air*.

But don't let the title throw you. It may be, as Keillor says, "a fresh start with new people under a new name and in a new place and a couple of years later." But when all is said and done, "the more it changes, it's the same."

Some men of Keillor's standing would be ashamed to admit that. They would be pig-headed and say good riddance to the old.

Not Keillor. He has "slowly come to the conclusion that the idea of novelty isn't particularly important to me or this show. I don't need to throw away good things just because somebody may accuse me of repeating myself."

Not that he didn't try. For several months he made "a serious attempt and wasted a great deal of time trying to invent a show about a cooperative apartment house in New York that was peopled entire-



Garrison Keillor

... a fresh start

... by Midwesterners."

Before the co-op got on the air, however, Keillor hired a mental wrecking ball. "If I came on the air and had to lay the groundwork for

this new place, it would take weeks to get out the necessary background. It would not be worth it. It would be too much trouble and not funny enough. So, I'm going back to what I know."

That means there will be lots of American-made music. "But I'm working with a 15-piece orchestra (instead of the old Butch Thompson Trio) playing more theater music and jazz."

There will be fictitious commercials from the old show's fictitious sponsors — but with new twists. Bertha's Kitty Boutiques have gone big business.

"Through leveraged buyouts and creative financing she has become a major mogul. She's stretched thin, but wide. She's now called the Bertha Companies."

One thing that hasn't gone corporate is Keillor's monologue. He'll

still call his message from his mythical hometown. "The News From Lake Wobegon" where Thanksgiving "was good but with complications. Certain feelings of mortality are closing in."

It's a place everyone wants to leave, but no one can. This push-pull relationship between heart and home is the stuff of Keillor's stories.

"I assume other people are like me," he says. "They are constantly trying to escape their family at the same as they are always going back to it. One of the best reasons for having a home is so you can run away from it."

*Garrison Keillor's American Radio Company of the Air debuts 6 p.m. Saturday on the American Public Radio network. It will be heard on WGUC-FM, 90.9 MHz.*