

Keillor seems 'at home' in New York show

By Rick Kogan
Chicago Tribune

"It's a little odd to be doing a show in New York City," Garrison Keillor said a few minutes after beginning to do just such a thing — much to the delight of most fans and, perhaps, to the consternation of a few others.

Saturday evening Keillor returned to radio, with a new weekly variety show called the "American Radio Company of the Air" (5 to 7 p.m. CST on American Public Radio or National Public Radio stations). Scheduled for a 20-week season, it was broadcast live from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, just across the East River from Keillor's

adopted home of Manhattan.

New York is a long way from Lake Wobegon, the mythical Minnesota town that sparked and nurtured Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion," the immensely popular show that attracted 4 million loyal listeners every week to American Public Radio before Keillor took a break in 1987.

Anyone expecting similarities between the old show and this new radio romp would only have to have heard "A Letter From New York" by company member Ken LaZebnick. With its transvestites and lesbians, it was more than a lifestyle away from tales of Lake Wobegon's Norwegian bachelors.

No doubt about it: "American Ra-

dio Company of the Air" was determinedly more urbane than the old show. But it was nevertheless constructed on the solid foundations of Keillor's skill and exhibited any number of familiar virtues and charms.

An innovative performer

Keillor is one of radio's most accomplished and innovative performers. "I believe in pretense," he said. "I believe you have to look reality in the eye ... and deny it."

This premiere was full and colorful, peppered with monologues and music, hilarious phony commercials and dramatic bits of varying length and success.

"They Were There: Great Moments in American History," which devilishly mangled such famous events as George Washington's silver dollar toss, was a hoot, as was the very short "Dutch Schultz: Bookseller." But the lengthy, to-be-continued adventures of a Gloria, "a young woman in Manhattan," struggled.

Monologues and music were the first show's principal delights. Remarkably varied, the music in-

cluded some jazz, two new works written specifically for the show by the great Tom Lehrer, some spunky oldies from an a cappella group called True Image, Keillor singing Chuck Berry's "Back in the USA" and a number of stunning songs from Eileen Farrell.

Keillor held this all together with typical aplomb: "I do often think about Lake Wobegon ... But it's possible to love two places at the same time."

But his affection for New York is shadowed by suspicion: "I see these signs 'no radio in car' ... makes you feel like you've lost half your audience." Yes, it was a little odd, Keillor in New York City — wonderfully odd and entertaining and likely to get more so.

How to hear it here

Quad-Citians can catch Keillor's new show on KSUI-FM (91.7), the public radio station in Iowa City, or KUNI-FM (94.5) out of Cedar Falls. WVIK-FM, the public station at Augustana College, Rock Island, will not carry the show because the cost was prohibitive.

Rock Hudson film completed

By Luaine Lee
Knight News Wire

They have completed production on the bio-pic on Rock Hudson. The two-hour movie, slated for airing on ABC later this season, stars Thomas Ian Griffith ("Karate Kid Part III") as Hudson. Andrew Robinson (who essayed *Liberace* on another

Movie about The Wall

When *The Wall* came tumbling down — could there be a TV movie far behind? A two-hour fictional film about the events in Eastern Europe over the last four months is planned by Citadel Entertainment. No cast yet, but the film is about the relationship between an American and