

AMERICAN RADIO COMPANY

OF THE AIR



Photo by Jonette Novak

Garrison Keillor's American Radio Company of the Air premieres today.

Keillor's back – live from New York

Noel Holston / Radio

On the phone from New York City Monday, Garrison Keillor casually mentioned that he had finished the first verse of his new theme song the night before. Which automatically tells you things:

One, that Keillor's new Minnesota Public Radio series, "American Radio Company of the Air," which makes its national debut at 5 p.m. today (KSJN-FM-91.1), is not a revival of "A Prairie Home Companion," and two, that whatever else has changed, Keillor's work habits haven't.

"Preparations are going as they always used to," Keillor said. "All of these other people on the show, who have theater or opera backgrounds, are awfully nervous because they're used to working months in advance. I just don't know how to do that. I need to be up against a deadline to make me get serious."

As of Monday, he hadn't decided what he was going to say in his first "American Radio Company" monologue. "I have a lot of notes and things going around in my head the way writers do, but there isn't any need to put it into a final form or even sit down and write it," he said. "I usually work until late morning, noon (on) Saturday."

Meanwhile, there was the matter of Thanksgiving dinner. "I have to cook the American," he said, referring to his Danish wife, Ulla Skoersted. "I'm supposed to know how to do this. If I were in Minnesota, we'd all go my mother's, so I have serious cooking responsibilities."

Keillor sounded not at all worried about the expectations of 3 million listeners who spent a decade hanging on his every word about Lake Wobegon, the fictional Minnesota community that "time forgot."

He said he fully expects some people to tune in, turn up their noses and tune out. "It'll sound too something, too New York, I don't know," he said. "But that's all right. For people to tune in at a particular time to a particular radio show is no small thing, and they have a right to expect something. But I guess I have a right not to meet those expectations."

Actually, what Keillor is planning, though it won't have singing commercials for Powdermilk Biscuits or tales of Buster the Show Dog, still is essentially a piece with "A Prairie Home Companion" and the early-morning disc-jockey show (on KSJN-FM in Collegeville, Minn.) from which it evolved. He'll be telling humorous stories and playing great American music neglected by commercial radio stations increasingly reliant on rock and contemporary pop. "Basically, I'm doing the same thing on the same impulse that I wanted to do when I was 13 years old," said Keillor, 47.

On "American Radio Company of the Air," which will originate from the Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn, N.Y., the music will lean more toward jazz and theater music, so listeners should expect a somewhat different sounding show. Keillor will be abetted by the Broadway Local Theater, a quartet of actor-singers Keillor and coproducer Randall Davidson have assembled, and a 10-to-20 piece orchestra. His musical guests tonight will be soprano Eileen Farrell, one of

HOLSTON Continued on page 2E



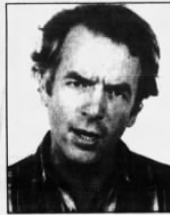
Michael Feldman



Dan Rowles



Tom Bodett



Spalding Gray



Noah Adams

Lake Wobegon's creator opened the door for others

By Ellen Foley/Staff Writer

Whether Garrison Keillor again becomes a radio mainstay or ends his reign after 21 more weeks on the air, his legacy is evident in the number of monologists and radio hosts who are filling the airwaves with top-quality humor and storytelling.

In fact, Keillor's spotty appearances since he left the

airwaves in June 1987 shifted the spotlight to the likes of Tom Bodett, the Motel 6 guy from Alaska; monologist Spalding Gray; folksy comic Dan Rowles, host of Minnesota Public Radio's "The First House on the Right;" and Michael Feldman of Wisconsin Public Radio's "What'd Ya Know?" — any of whom could become a de facto replacement for Keillor should he find it expeditious to sign off the air for good.

Most of them have been touted as the next Garrison Keillor at various times. And while all of them tip their hats to Keillor, each has a distinctive style that makes him different and even perhaps a little fresher than the Keillor we knew.

Writer/actor/storyteller Gray, for example, uses film, live performance and the written word to disseminate his edgy

KEILLOR Continued on page 2E

HOLSTON: Keillor plans to be less prominent on show

Continued from page 1E

Those rare opera stars who can still easily go jazz and pop standards, and Buz Thompson, "A Prairie Home Companion's" house pianist.

Pianist James Tocco will join Keillor and company on the Dec. 2 show, the Metropolitan Rhythm Kings vocal group on Dec. 3 and opera star Marilyn Horne on Dec. 16. The Dec. 24 and Mar. 24 broadcasts will originate from the World Theater in St. Paul.

"I'm trying to make it a show of comedy, music, and musical segments in which the host is less prominent," Keillor said. "I don't need to be as present as I was on 'A Prairie Home Companion.' I think that it was one of the weaknesses of the show — it had this slow-moving guy who was all over the place. So we're seeing a new show."

Of the Broadway Local company, named to New York City on a 10-year contract, Keillor said:

"One of our problems at the conclusion of 'A Prairie Home Companion' was that we kind of had a soft personality. It was, not being

subway train, the Broadway Local, Keillor said. "They can sing and act and do comedy. They seemed to be a group that was really talented. Believe me, you all do and do auditions day after day, you see a lot of people. When talent walks in the room, you just know it. God, it's lovely. I want to write for them."

According to Tom Voigli, MPR's vice president of national programming, "American Radio Company" will be broadcast by 650 public-radio stations, compared to the 525 that were carrying "A Prairie Home Companion" when Keillor stopped that show 2½ years ago.

Far from disappointed, Voigli said, "I'm excited about the station's enthusiasm for the new, untaxed variety show, '100% Prairie Home Companion.'" He said, "MPR 'has a new level of station carriage that is unlike any other program we have produced or probably ever will produce."

"We had the time slot (Saturdays, 8 p.m.), incredible production facilities, great people on staff," he said. "I was out manifest destiny to try back then."

But Voigli acknowledged that "Good Evening" failed. "We took it off, didn't we?" and that MPR's management kept from the

success of Keillor's show on nonmembered MPR's other production stations. It's really doing very well," he said.

It was during this time that MPR launched "Good Evening," with Noah Adams, cohost of National Public Radio's afternoon magazine "All Things Considered." Placed into a "Prairie Home" class variety format to which his talents weren't ideally suited, Keillor said, "Good Evening" was abandoned. "Voigli said, 'I don't know why other MPR productions, such as "The Sunday Morning" and "Sound Money," aren't working.' "Good Evening" started with a lineup of about 130 and scarcely moved beyond that, Voigli said.

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As a proof of perspective regained, Voigli cited MPR's success on "Good Evening," "The First House on the Right," a comedy-variety show hosted by Dan Rowley, a contributor to Adams' show and "Prairie Home." "Quasi" introduced a few months ago on Friday nights, where it could draw up without interest scrutiny. "First House on the Right" was canceled. MPR is moving it into the Saturday, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. slot, where it will follow "American Radio Company."

"In every way," Voigli said, "we tried to set a criteria for 'First House' that says, 'Just be damned good for a while.'"

Voigli said that getting Keillor back on the air was not a necessity for MPR but, rather, a bonus.

"Nobody at MPR went to Garrison to get Keillor," he said. "We need a

radio show. 'Nobody headed' it, and we need to be creating the best radio we can in a whole new way. There was financial reason. Garrison wanted to do it."

Keillor's recollection is different. He said he couldn't quite remember the order of events but, "I think the MPR's president mentioned considering in with something new."

"I think what had held me back was the idea that I should meet something new," Keillor said. "But there is nothing literary new in this business."

"It seemed to me, on consideration, that doing the show in New York and doing it now would make it new, and that the idea of a live radio variety show is such a simple and perfect idea that only good things can come from it," he said.

"So all I had to do was to clear up my motives a bit. One should never be ambivalent out of obligation."

Pianist Mustonen takes romantic route in performance of Rachmaninoff Third

By Michael Anthony Staff Writer

In an odd coincidence, Edo de Waart's subscription program with the Minnesota Orchestra this week pays tribute to Vladimir Horowitz, who died exactly this month at the age of 86.

It was the Chalkovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 with which Horowitz made his New York debut in 1926. It was another concerto, the Rachmaninoff Third, that he played in New York six weeks later, and he was playing it throughout his career.

De Waart is conducting that work this week with the young Finnish pianist Olli Mustonen as soloist.

Whether Horowitz's special affinity for the work — along with that dry, malcontented sound he drew from it, both in concert and in the several recordings — actually scared away other pianists can't be known for sure, but it seems likely. The fact is, until recent years, the Rachmaninoff Third was something of a rarity in the concert hall. It rarely was played in the United States, and it rarely was played in the United States, and it rarely was played in the United States.

Horowitz, whose concerto repertoire was fairly small to begin with, took to it. He had the first movement or less to himself. He also had the blessing of the composer. Legend has it that when Rachmaninoff first heard Horowitz play the piece, he was astonished. "He realized it whole," said Horowitz.

While one finds easily of the composer's Second Concerto, the Third remains as elusive. This is partly because of its length, and partly because of the music, which is twisting, pungent and somewhat obscure. It is difficult to play, and it is difficult to hear.

Mustonen, who made his local debut last Wednesday night at Orchestra Hall, is playing it with a romantic approach to the work — a concept that is not surprising. He added nuance and shading to the opening theme, and he underlined the score's lyrical passages with delicate articulation.

To the bigger, more assertive moments, he brought ample technique, a strong sense of rhythm and frequent touches of the restless impetuosity that was his trademark.

Some sense of atmosphere was still lacking, however — a sense of the vastness of the work. The performance was rendered clearly, but it was not as if the music were being played for the first time. While De Waart sustained a sensible tempo, the orchestra's playing was somewhat flat, and the overall tone of the performance was one of excitement.

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Minnesota Orchestra
When: Ed. de Waart, conductor; Olli Mustonen, guest soloist
Where: Orchestra Hall
When: 11 a.m. Thursday
Tickets: \$7.50 to \$27; call 371-2252

Mustonen showed ample technique and rhythmic assurance, playing Rachmaninoff's Third with a sense of drama and a touch of the composer's trademark. De Waart ably led with vigor by Elgar and Lutoslawski.

The second half was taken up with works by Witold Lutoslawski and Edward Elgar. Lutoslawski's "Violent Games," composed in 1961, makes use of the aleatoric techniques common in compositions of the '50s, which call for the musicians to make up their own parts, within certain guidelines. Wednesday night, this was intricate by the orchestra's playing, and the overall tone of the performance was one of excitement.

Elgar's familiar "Enigma Variations No. 7" needed more even texture and a more assertive tone. De Waart played it with a slightly crisp woodwind playing, projecting the shape of each variation while fitting each into the whole structure.

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Victorian Continued from page 1E

old-fashioned aesthetic of beauty and grace. As an approach the third millennium, it is the equipment needed for living the Victorian life is fresh, available, not only from antique stores, but from shops such as Laura Ashley and all of the businesses that advertise in the back pages of (what else?) *Victorian* magazine.

The new Victorians do not, in most instances, embrace wholeheartedly the Victorian aesthetic. Instead of renouncing the options that have been given them, they have opted for a mix of the old and the new. Builders are beginning to cater to the growing band of eclectic individuals by designing new structures with the best of both worlds. The new Victorians do not, in most instances, embrace wholeheartedly the Victorian aesthetic. Instead of renouncing the options that have been given them, they have opted for a mix of the old and the new.

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"They don't have a lot of gingerbread and woodwork on the houses here," said Joe Pittino, a real estate agent and author of the book "The Victorian Home." "But some people here do have it."

A surprising amount of Victorian clothing has survived, and the internet shopper can find a variety of pieces in vintage shops, ranging from \$50 to \$1,000. Some are even altered for a more modern fit. Not only are men's and women's fashions being revived, but so are the styles of the past. Victorian-era clothing has survived, and the internet shopper can find a variety of pieces in vintage shops, ranging from \$50 to \$1,000.

Some of the most popular Victorian garments are high-necked, long-sleeved blouses, high-waisted dresses, and corsets. These items are often made of high-quality fabrics, such as silk and cotton. Victorian-era clothing has survived, and the internet shopper can find a variety of pieces in vintage shops, ranging from \$50 to \$1,000.

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PLOW: Triangle reflects Mamet view of the world

Continued from page 1E

one is not interested in Bobby. A lot is made and Bobby puts on his movie, one of which is giving Karen a book to read so she will come to his home later to discuss the merit as the basis for a possible movie.

The book is by an "Eastern essay writer," and Bobby has been ordered to give it "courtesy reading" before it is recycled. Bobby has already read it, and he is now trying to convince Karen that the coming end of the world by nuclear war is the work of God, and that massive radiation is a means of producing a new breed of humanity free of fear.

Karen believes the book must be made into a movie. She tries to convince Bobby that the physical things that turn Bobby into a movie star are not doing "the right thing" — words

A review

This triangle embodies the essence of Mamet's view: gained so vividly in such earlier plays as "American Buffalo" and "Glengarry Glen Ross." "Charlie and Bobby are trying to survive in a system that rewards greed and ambition but offers no social concern or before profit. This isn't just Hollywood money, it's a system that turns well-meaning men and women into servants of meanness and greed."

Charlie and Bobby know what they have become but are willing to pay the human price. It is a scene and a proud of it, but I'm a secure man. Bobby's it's Mamet's point that one can remain a whore,

but it's far from a secure business. Mixed Blood's production, surely directed by Michael Krasn, both reveals the play's powerful message

Speed-the-Plow

When: Mixed Blood Theatre. Directed by Michael Krasn.
Where: 1551 S. 4th St., Minneapolis.
When: 10:30 p.m. Tuesday and Saturday, 3:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 3:30 p.m. Sunday.
Tickets: \$7.50 Thursday and Sunday, \$10 Friday and Saturday, \$26-\$31.

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but it's far from a secure business. Mixed Blood's production, surely directed by Michael Krasn, both reveals the play's powerful message

and captures the idiosyncratic nature of Mamet's dialogue. No American playwright has his ear for everyday speech. His characters converse in terse, snappy and half-formed thoughts; the words are but guides to thought and motivation.

Mark Stone is utterly appalled by the shambles Bobby. Yet Stone shows enough subtlety to make us believe Bobby is capable of conversion by Karen. Joe Kinsey's Charlie is a similarly effective — a tough, desperate little man who acts like a caged animal when he sees his old chance about to evaporate.

La Rivarotta is a delightfully ambiguous Karen, with the apparent innocence and underlying cunning that make this woman so compelling and multifaceted. The two women extreme yet together at a crackling pace, finding the edge of humor and pain that makes Mamet tick. And he has no doubt that "Speed-the-Plow" is Mamet at his best, often hilarious, but

smart enough to do it differently," he said.

Bodet's style of creating characters is similar to Keillor's. "As a listener, I remember the first time I heard the material for his 15-month-old show, 'The End of the Road,' continue on his radio show in a kind of soap-opera format.

The comparisons with Keillor in the established radio comedia a bit and Bodet, who spent five years with National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," even said he was being the comparisons can backfire.

He said he wants his style to remain spontaneous and, by constantly analyzing himself, he worries like the kid who comes in late for gym class, suddenly realizes everyone is looking at him, finds that he has to go to work and begins to stumble.

"I'm a very simple storyteller. It's a very spontaneous impulse. I'm not

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THE CROWD
72

Keillor

Continued from page 2E

Adams, trained in news, had trouble carrying the variety program and opted to go back to NPR news programming in Washington, D.C.

Rowles, a vocal fan of Keillor's who has worked with him, appears to be doing better with "The First House on the Right."

Rowles too sees distinct differences between his humor and Keillor's. Rowles says he's more of a ventriloquist, using the voices of rough urban characters, such as his favorite, Harold, the handyman who works on the first house on the right.

Harold is "self-employed but not by much" and preaches that "if you want to meet your neighbors, rent a dumpster," according to Rowles, a native of North Minneapolis.

He too is concerned by the comparison to Keillor, saying that the jury's still out on his show, now only 12 shows old.

"Garrison's long suit is that he writes so well and good writing shows up on the radio. I think my stuff is mostly pretty good. It's fun to do anyway. The thing is that the audience is the ultimate jury and when people laugh that's the ultimate verdict."

Michael Feldman of the five-year-old "Whad' Ya Know?" says he's not a monologist.

"I'm not a monologist; I'm a Presbyterian," he said.

And even though the New York Times last month hinted that he might be filling Keillor's shoes, he denies it. He responded to the Times' attempt to anoint him as Keillor's successor with a press release in October rebutting the idea:

"I feel obligated to point out that if the shoe fit ("A Radio Host Wears Keillor's Shoes," Oct. 28, 1989), it may have been due to the fact that I left mine on before slipping into his. Still, that leaves plenty of room to grow."

Feldman says his inspiration comes mainly from Groucho Marx, adding: "I'm Groucho Keillor."

Famous for throwing a dart at a map and then calling people there to question them on the air, Feldman, 40, says what he does would be prosecutable if it were not on public radio.

"If people are looking for the next great monologist, they might try looking at bus stations. There've got to be some there."

His answer about whom should be the next Garrison Keillor is simple:

"I think Garrison Keillor should be the next Garrison Keillor."

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