

# Back where he belongs

## Keillor's homecoming gets royal reception

By Susan Barber  
Leader-Telegram staff

**S**T. PAUL — His opening number said it all. "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," crooned Garrison Keillor at Friday night's concert at the new Minnesota History Center, which kicked off the weekend's season premiere of the American Radio Company.

He was back. Back in Minnesota, the land of Lake Wobegon, Lutherans and "towns full of names that nobody gives to kids anymore."

He says he came back because he is in a "delicate" time of life. His hair "has been going downhill for years," the result of taking the show on the road and using free shampoo samples in cheap hotels.

He says he came back to Minnesota in search of a good barber.

(Past. Garrison. You work in radio. We can't see you. Your hair doesn't matter. Not to us anyway.)

But on this night — a cool, crisp, Minnesota fall night — the true reason for the prairie home companion's return after five years of a somewhat strained relationship with his native Minnesota was clear. There is no place like home.

The audience clapped loudly and knowingly when, in his opening monologue, Keillor thanked them for helping "a middle aged man get over this awkward time in our life."

At age 50, Keillor said adolescence was a confusing time for him — especially since he didn't start living it until he was in his 40s.

With his trademark wire-rimmed glasses and a gray double-breasted suit coat that he buttoned and unbuttoned as he spoke, the red tie and matching red socks gave away the secret sense of fun that Keillor must rely on his voice to portray on the radio.

Radio, said Keillor, is an antiquity, an anachronism. And it's rough on its performers. "You can't hear applause in radio," Keillor said. "You never know if you're successful."

"Thirty-two shows," he muttered a few times as if overwhelmed by the American Radio



Garrison Keillor and cast perform with the American Radio Company, which had its season premiere in St. Paul this weekend. Keillor opened with a one-man show Friday at the Minnesota History Center and had the company's first live radio broadcast of the season Saturday at the World Theater.

### Listening to Garrison

You can catch Garrison Keillor's "American Radio Company" two-hour variety show of comedy, music, special guests and news from Lake Wobegon:

**On air:** 5 to 7 p.m. Saturdays on WHWC-FM/Menomonie-Eau Claire (88.3).

**Live:** 5 to 7 p.m. Saturdays, World Theater, St. Paul. Sixteen of the 32 shows this season will be broadcast there. For dates and ticket information, contact the American Radio Company at (612) 290-1480.

### Concert Review

Company season ahead.

"I don't know anybody who sits down and listens to the radio. . . ."

"We're producing a product nobody needs out there."

But somebody must.

He talked of listeners approaching him and recounting "with surprising clarity" a story he told during a broadcast.

And that's the point, Keillor said:

"To give people something that they'll hold onto and keep . . . and infuse it with their own life."

Those stories, that only he can tell, were full of life Friday night. Like the one about Thanksgiving 1968 at Aunt Flo and Uncle Al's house, having dinner with "people we were afraid we would grow up to be like," Keillor said, coining the term "chromosomophobia." With card tables filled with relatives as far as the eye could see, Uncle Carl said grace and wept at the part when Jesus dies just as a young cousin power puked all over

the holiday spread.

At Friday night's show, as in a live radio broadcast, timing is key. Keillor was in sync with pianist Richard Dworsky, singing and swaying to such sweet-sad songs as "It Gets Lonely in a Small Town" and "The Cheapest Kind."

That voice, that so-very Garrison Keillor voice that you usually hear while peeling potatoes or scraping paint off a hope chest on a Saturday night, was in top form at this performance.

Yes, Keillor was back — poking fun at himself and, of course, the press. "The press, God bless them, is there to deflate us," said Keillor, mentioning how a reporter from U.S. News and World Report had asked him how it felt to be given a cold reception by Minnesotans for his homecoming.

"I tried to explain to her that this is Minnesota — the state of understatement. They only give a standing ovation if someone is seriously ill."

Maybe Keillor has some rare form of hair cancer. Minnesotans were on their feet applauding as he left the stage.