

# GARRISON KEILLOR Prairie perspective

He'll air one show from B.C.

Garrison Keillor felt like a pilot trying to land his airplane at the wrong airport.

There he was, broadcasting live to a radio audience of



DAMIAN INWOOD  
Celebrities

two million people, and his News from Lake Wobegon story was going terribly wrong. "I knew where I was going but it seemed that when

I started, I was getting too close to the end too soon," he says. "It's a panicky feeling. You launch it and after five minutes you are coming in for a landing and you need to go further. So I

threw in some other details and then I had to sweat to get the strings disentangled." Keillor brings A Prairie Home Companion, his popular U.S. radio show, to Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre this weekend.

It's the first time the show has been broadcast from Canada.

#### HEARD LIVE

Saturday's broadcast will be heard live in the U.S. on 350 public radio stations and on tape on CBC Radio 690 at 3 p.m. on Sunday.

The show includes CBC's Double Exposure team of Bob Robertson and Linda Cullen, plus radio hosts Vicki Gabereau and Bill Richardson.

As well as his radio show, broadcast weekly from St. Paul, Minn., Keillor is well known for his best-selling 1985 book, Lake Wobegon Days, which put him on the cover of Time magazine.

It's the unscripted 30-minute story from the small, fictional Midwest community that's the



Garrison Keillor, far right, and some of the cast of A Prairie Home Companion.

### What's MORE...

Garrison Keillor says he likes taking his radio show on the road where audiences aren't as quiet as back home in Minnesota. "These people tend to feel the stories are about them and so they lack distance, and this sometimes makes them uncomfortable," he says. "I told a story last week about a phone problem in Lake Wobegon. The Lutheran minister was patched into the line and recognized one of the voices. He realized that the woman was making a date with a man who was not her husband — she was a woman taken in adultery. He listened to this in horror and interest. The audience became very quiet. They didn't like to hear a story about adultery set in Minnesota."

centre-piece of A Prairie Home Companion, which has been on the air since 1974.

Keillor says the community is home to a group of people from farming stock.

"They tend to be more patient," he says.

"They tend to move a little slower because when you are working with large animals, losing your temper doesn't do any good. They are not under illusions that city people are under, that they are somehow in control of their destiny."

The 53-year-old Keillor, who hails from Anoka, Minn., cancelled the show in 1987 and moved to New York.

"I think it was because I was just tired," he says. "It was a kind of crazy thing to do — the show was at the peak of its popularity."

It turned out well.

"I went to New York because I had never lived anywhere except the Midwest. Here I was in my mid-40s, it was embarrassing for an adult to live such an insular life."

He got an office at New Yorker magazine, did some writing, went to the opera, saw a lot of movies and ate

more restaurant food than he was used to.

"I had a whee of a time, then I came home," he says. The show returned in 1989.

#### IT WENT WRONG IN JUNEAU

And the story that went wrong? It was in Juneau, Alaska, in the summer of '86.

"We had a native American dance troupe on the show. They had done a bit early on and they were going to be on later.

"I remember they wore ankle bells and they were getting restless."

The story was about an aunt who'd gone to Alaska as a missionary and then had fallen in love with a prospector.

"I had a very clear idea of how the story would end — she would get rich and then she'd lose everything and come back to Minnesota," he says.

Then came the problems.

"The story wasn't ending and it sort of got away from me. I could hear bells jingling behind me and the audience seemed quite stunned.

"I had gone 30 minutes, the stage manager came out and handed me a note that said 'three minutes,' and I was doing my very best and I was bringing this thing to an end. He handed me another note and it said, 'Just say goodnight.'"

"I did. The on-air light went out, the audience applauded. I went back and there were a lot of people, including my staff, who didn't want to look me straight in the eye.

"I've never gone back to listen to that monologue."