



Entertainer Garrison Keillor

By JOAN LYBARGER
Of the Tribune Staff

There's just no telling where an addiction will lead. Take me, for instance. Who would have thought that a taste for Bach and Beethoven would lead to an appetite for Powdermilk Biscuits?

But let me explain. A couple of years ago I discovered via KLSE (91.7 FM) the delights of Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) — an oasis of classics in a desert of rock, where Beethoven heads the Top 40. But then, amid the cantatas, toccatas and fugues, what to my wondering ears should appear but the pickin', fiddlin' and strummin' of the Powdermilk Biscuit Band, the pitches for those wondrous biscuits, and host Garrison Keillor, their gentle purveyor on "A Prairie Home Companion."

It didn't take long to get hooked on the down-home drolleries.

A satirical take-off on the old-time radio variety show, it's a

put-on, but never a put-down. And like all good variety shows, it occasionally takes to the road. Originally scheduled for the Viterbo Fine Arts Center, last night's show was moved to the Main Theater when more than 450 persons proved that they are tuned in not only to MPR but to the special talents of "the old soul." Low-key Keillor, the show's creator, has the slow, easy humor and the erudite yet homespun style so reminiscent of commercial broadcasting's Dave Garroway. Produced weekly in St. Paul's Ramsey Arts and Science Center, "Companion" is heard at 5:30 p.m. Saturdays. A morning version, in which old masters mix easily with related patter, is broadcast from 8 to 9 a.m. Tuesdays through Fridays. Last night's show was taped for rebroadcast on Jan. 8 and 15, Keillor noted.

On the road with him is the Powdermilk Biscuit Band — Rudy Douglas, mandolin and spoons

(yep, spoons), and Adam Granger, guitar.

The talented trio set hands clapping and toes tapping to the lively sounds of country, folk and gospel music, hornpipes and reels, while Keillor sang the first two songs "to peg your expectations low."

Also on the bill was some talent in the form of Viterbo's Sister Thea Bowman and the Hallelujah Singers.

Tall, thin and bearded, the bespectacled Keillor strolled onstage, autograph in hand. And you know that beneath the straw hat and red suspenders there lurks an urbane and witty man, equally at home as a writer for the New Yorker as in his guise as a pseudo-country boy...

one knew the score" and the participants "sat around discussing what is baseball. It's not, isn't it... it's about relationships." Others reacted differently. "Uncle Charlie Crisp stumped up the monument to the Unknown Norwegian, claiming that Iefse was no person."

Keillor and many of his fans recall radio of yesteryear with nostalgia. I, for example, given a couple of drinks and the slight provocation, will declaim the fourth of "Mr. District Attorney" or sing the Cream of Wheat jingle of "Let's Pretend" dredged up from childhood.

Yet Keillor maintains that "A Prairie Home Companion" is not nostalgia, but an effort at recapturing the old art of live variety show broadcasting. It is very angry," he said. But morning "is a different time of day — it needs a little silliness and humor." And his type of programming has merits of its own. "Folk music," he said, "is dear to the hearts of generations — it has cultural importance that far exceeds a great deal of classical music."

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he began inserting spot announcements for Jack's, interspersed some blue grass and gradually introduced the rest of Lake Wobegon's denizens. The little town and the show's format are based on reality, Keillor said, mentioning a station that unwittingly does satire "better than I do," and the church that has an annual blessing of the snowmobiles — "to what end, I have no idea."

Not all public broadcasting bulls approve of Keillor and Co. "Some don't accept it, they get very angry," he said. But morning "is a different time of day — it needs a little silliness and humor." And his type of programming has merits of its own. "Folk music," he said, "is dear to the hearts of generations — it has cultural importance that far exceeds a great deal of classical music."

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The Powdermilk Biscuit Band

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What's Happening...

In Minnesota

Weather Outlook? More Of Same

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — John E. Ross, associate director for the University of Wisconsin Institute of Environmental Studies, says weather follows a pattern of high and low intensities and he predicts that "the next five years are going to be very much like the last five years. Changes in pattern of the magnitude we would need to get more favorable patterns simply do not tend to show up in less than five years," he said. "That gives us a fairly pessimistic estimate for the next five years, because climate has caused us trouble in the last five years," he said. Ross spoke to the Minnesota Farmers Union at its annual convention.

In Wisconsin

Silence Takes Over

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A 122-year-old tradition has been suspended by University of Wisconsin-Madison Chancellor Edwin Young. There will be no invocation or benediction during UW commencement ceremonies. Young said he had decided to follow the recommendation of a student-faculty committee that suggested the two portions of the program be replaced with a moment of personal reflection. The two religious portions of the commencement ceremony had been opposed by the Freedom from Religion Foundation, which contends that their inclusion violates the separation of church and state. The decision is in effect for the Dec. 12 commencement ceremony.

Italians May Import Wine From Vineyards In California

WASHINGTON (AP) — The idea of Italy importing wine from California sounds almost as absurd as Kansas buying wheat from Russia but that's exactly what the Agriculture Department says might happen.

Two U.S. wine producers exhibited their wares at the annual Vini d'Italia show in Verona, Italy, this fall, Sept. 19-26. The department's Foreign Agricultural Service said that during the show more than 150 inquiries were received about the possibility of importing U.S. wines.

Officials said that "any foothold in this market, of course, would represent a breakthrough" since Italy is the world's leading wine exporter.

In 1975, for example, Italy sold \$466 million worth of wine overseas, including \$56 million of it to U.S. buyers.

Court Candidate Raps Reform Plan

falling from the sky."

Another local landmark is Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility Catholic Church. Father Emil got a new curule this year, Keillor related, who split off and formed his own group after he celebrated Easter Mass wearing a T-shirt with a picture of our Lord on water skis and the words, "He's Up!"

And, though he didn't mention it last night, Lake Wobegon also is the home of the Sons of Knute Lodge, presided over by the Grand Oja (that's pronounced oh-yah), whose chief function it is to accept new members by standing in the corner and crying out, "Oh, Yah, Oh, Yah."

Because satire is but a slight bending of the truth, few in the audience could fail to identify with it and laugh at their own foibles. And through it all Keillor wove his gentle philosophy of life and love. Don't worry if you're too tall, and not good looking or smart, he tells us — just go out and accomplish something. ("And don't forget, Powdermilk gives shy people the strength to do it.")

A 34-year-old native of Anoka, Minn., the 1966 English graduate of the University of Minnesota got into radio at a student station. After a couple of years as a writer, he joined MPR and has been with it most of the time since 1969.

As announcer of an early morning classical music show,