

# 'Prairie Home Companion' will be offered to 220 public radio stations

By Peg Meier  
Staff Writer

Minnesota Public Radio's live variety show, "A Prairie Home Companion," will go national in May.

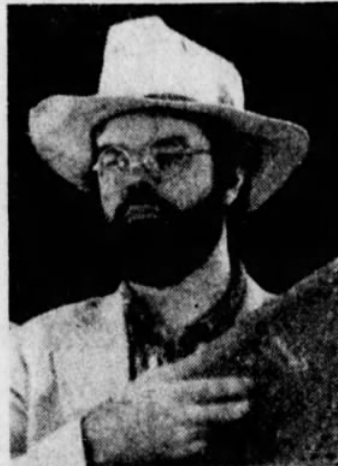
The format will stay the same: Garrison Keillor will be the host. The show will be recorded at the World Theater in downtown St. Paul. The music will be a mixture of bluegrass, classical, religious and old favorites. Keillor will read letters from Lake Wobegone and poems by Margaret Haskins Durber, the mythical town's mythical poet laureate. Jack's Auto Repair will make its pitch.

The only big change is that 220 public radio stations across the country will be able to pick up the show. For free.

The network announced Friday that Cargill, Inc., will underwrite the program and offer it without cost to public radio stations for the first year. Neither Cargill nor Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) would reveal how much money Cargill is contributing. Cargill was the underwriter when the Saturday evening show began in June 1976.

Keillor and MPR officials promised that the program will retain its Minnesota flavor.

"A show sounds better if it's done from a particular place rather than a



Garrison Keillor with autoharp

station in the sky," Keillor said yesterday. "Goodness knows, we all get enough references to things in California that I have not much knowledge of or interest in. I think we can talk about Minnesota without having to explain everything."

He said he is trying to "get more of a variety show. We're booking more classical musicians; I want to have some contrast for the guitars."

The show will be produced each Saturday from 5 to 7 p.m., beginning May 3. Public radio stations will be encouraged to carry it live, but they may broadcast it up to 10 p.m. the

same evening.

One special show will be broadcast nationwide on a March Sunday. Representatives of public radio stations will meet in Kansas City beginning March 16, and "A Prairie Home Companion" will be broadcast from there that night.

The show has gone national only once, last February. Then 65 stations picked it up.

Transmission of the show hinges on new satellite technology, to be finished in the middle of 1980. The satellites will allow national transmission of music with high-quality sound. The present technology, involving land lines, is not nearly so good. The satellites also will permit more diversity. Each local station will be able to choose among a variety of live and taped programs.

Sally Pope, MPR vice president, said, "The technology will change literally with a flip of the switch. Even though the technology is an instant change, stations' budgets will increase only gradually. They'll have the world at their transmitters but they'll have to pay for much of it. We're pleased we found an underwriter so we can offer 'A Prairie Home Companion' free."

The show will stay the same, she said: "When you have a success, you don't change it."