

Radio show spreads joy by satellite

*Broadcasters gather
at annual conference
to give ear to the future*

By Peter Wilkerson
A Member of the Staff

Kansas City was the site Sunday night of the first nationally syndicated satellite broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion," one of the most popular shows presented by the National Public Radio network.

The variety show of music and humor, performed at Crown Center Hotel, highlighted the opening day of the annual Public Radio Conference, this year titled "Sound Thinking: Fine Tuning the Future." Nearly 1,000 public radio professionals have gathered for the four days of meetings and workshops.

The performance of "A Prairie Home Companion" was broadcast by KCUR-FM, the public radio station of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The show's host was Garrison Keillor, a humorist, a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine, and a veteran of 18 years in public radio.

Every week, Keillor weaves into the variety show stories about his mythical hometown of Lake Wobegon. A major feature of the show is the presentation of both well-known and unknown musicians and performers. Noted artists such as Vassar Clements, Martha Schlamme, and Sonny Terry have performed on the show.

Sunday's two-hour show included Fats Waller songs played by the Butch Thompson Trio; Ken Bloom, playing zither and small pipes; a Radio Romance Theater drama; and resident show ensemble, The New Prairie Ramblers.

"A Prairie Home Companion" has been a mainstay of the Minnesota Public Radio network for five years. Its regular home is The World Theatre in St. Paul, Minn. The show, which is supported by a grant from Cargill Inc., won a Local Program Award from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in 1979.

The keynote speaker at Sunday's performance was American dramatist Arthur Kopit. Kopit's radio drama, "Wings," won the 1980 Prix Italia, the highest international broadcast award. The first broadcast program produced in this country to win the coveted prize, "Wings" was originally produced for NPR's radio drama series "EARPLAY."

Kopit said public radio's dramas are building a solid bond with emerging American writers, many of whom, just a few years ago, could not imagine radio drama being practical. The conference speaker list includes:

- Charles B. Ferris, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, which regulates radio and television stations. He will speak today at noon on the future of federal broadcasting regulation.

- Harriet Kaplan, president of the National Radio Broadcasters Association, who will speak at 9 a.m. Tuesday on deregulation of broadcasting.

- Robben Fleming, president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, who will speak Tuesday afternoon on "Critical Issues Facing Public Radio."