



Biscuits Are His Gravy

They Sponsor Minnesota Man's Humor Show Heard In Polk

By DIANE EGNER
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LAKELAND — Does anyone out there not like powdered milk biscuits? I mean, the home-made variety spread with fresh butter and honey, of course.

Who could turn them down, especially if the flour was packaged appealingly in a bright red box and they could be taken home fresh in a brown-stained paper bag?

Biscuits are the chief sponsor of a two-hour radio program brought to listeners live from St. Paul, Minn., every Saturday night on FM-90 plus, a public radio station out of Orlando and easily within range of most of Polk County.

The mostly tongue-in-cheek low-key humor on the show is written and delivered by one Minnesota native named Garrison Keillor. (Readers of *The New Yorker* magazine may be familiar with his poetry and fiction.)

His rich baritone voice rarely cracks to indicate the fun behind the show's sponsors but the humor is there for the intent listener.

Every Saturday night Keillor intones the old Hank Snow tune "Hello Love" to start *A Prairie Home Companion* show, which runs from 6 to 8 p.m.

Musicians playing a mandolin, fiddle and bass frequently join Keillor on the autoharp, who is brought to you "live by the folks in Lake Wobegon, Minnesota" and by the Powdermilk Biscuits that come in the bright red box.

Keillor doesn't hesitate to get in a few plugs at the top of every show for the biscuits that "make shy people bold and make bold people sit back and listen for once."

FM-90 plus began carrying the syndicated show in July after overcoming its fears that the music and humor might be limited to a Midwest audience, said program manager Peter Dominowski.

"It has been a rousing success," Dominowski said. "Public response has been overwhelmingly positive."

"The show is extremely human," Dominowski said. "It is irreverent without being offensive."

Take Lake Wobegon (as in woe-be-gone), a small town in central Minnesota that was left off the map due to a surveying error.

It's often called "the little town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve."

And it's a place where "all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above average."

Father Emil of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility often hangs out at the Chatterbox Cafe, which is presided over by Dorothy, who refuses to hand out doggie bags. "Take what you want, but eat what you take — and if you're not hungry, don't come," she advises townfolk.

Just down Main Street is Bob's Hank, a green mobile home that operates by the motto, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be. Save at the sign of the sock."

Much of the town was built up by the town's entrepreneur, Jack. He has built such empires as Jack's Head Stop program that teaches intellectuals to enjoy pursuits like bowling, and Jack's Auto Repair where Norwegians will put the dents back into your car.

And not faraway, the Featmenger Shop has been serving the town's phobias since 1972.

Tales about Lake Wobegon and her townfolk are interspersed with the real "meat" of the show: music.

Keillor's autoharp is usually combined with guests to play bluegrass, gospel, ethnic tunes and folk music. But he also brings out musicians who play their knees, mouths, cheeks, foreheads and more.

Keillor began the show in 1974 on Minnesota Public Radio along with his *Prairie Home Morning Show*, a combination news and features program on at 6 a.m. in the Midwest.

His Saturday night show is most often performed at the World Theater in downtown St. Paul but made a national tour this past summer.

Shortly after the evening show became syndicated in 1980, it won the coveted Peabody Award, the Oscar of radio.

Garrison Keillor hosts A Prairie Home Companion show. — Photo by Steve Voeller