

Television

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Prairie Home Companion crazy voice of Midwest

Has your family tried 'em?
Powdermilk? Powdermilk!
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Powdermilk? Powdermilk!
'Cause if your family's tried 'em,
You know you've satisfied 'em.
They're a real hot item, Powdermilk!

That ode to Powdermilk Biscuits, sponsor of National Public Radio's most unusual program, pretty much sums up the attitude of the show.

"Powdermilk Biscuits" host Garrison Keillor crowns. "Made of that whole wheat raised in the rich bottom lands of the Lake Wobegon River valley by Norwegian bachelor farmers, so that you know it's not only good for you, it's also pure — mostly!"

Actually, there is no such thing as Powdermilk Biscuits. There is no town in Wisconsin called Lake Wobegon. And, for all we know, there may not even be a radio program called "The Prairie Home Companion."

Heaven forbid. Out of Keillor's fertile imagination — almost as fertile as that Lake Wobegon River valley — has come a delightful slice of Americana, filled with Keillor's homespun tales of whimsy, satire and pure nonsense.

EIGHT YEARS OLD. "A Prairie Home Companion" joined the National Public Radio network two years ago. It finally got picked up in March by WYSO, the Antioch station, which airs the show live from 6 to 8 p.m. Saturdays. It's become the second most popular program



Tom Hopkins

on NPR after "All Things Considered."

And all things considered might also describe the music on "A Prairie Home Companion." It careens wildly from jazz and bluegrass to classical, opera, choral, Yiddish folk songs and mouth music. If you haven't heard Dr. Tom Weaver tap out "The William Tell Overture" on his teeth, you've missed something.

Such goings-on could never emanate from New York or L.A. Instead, each program is beamed out live from an old theater in St. Paul, Minn., where Keillor, a disc jockey and ex-writer for *The New Yorker*, fills in the long pauses between musical acts by spinning some of the most fanciful stories we've heard since Will Rogers.

Keillor has made the denizens of Lake Wobegon so familiar that tourists sometimes drive around Wisconsin, looking for the nonexistent hamlet.

AMONG THE TOWN landmarks that pop up regularly in Keillor's ramblings is Lake Wobegon's hallowed house of worship. Our

Lady of Perpetual Responsibility Church. "Church for us always began on Saturday night when we all took baths," Keillor intoned the other evening. "The level of the lake always dropped about six inches."

Then there's Jack's Head Stop Center, which traces high-minded stuff like bowling, and the Fearmonger Shop, which caters to paranoids of all kinds. The shop offers a safety toilet elevated 36 inches, so as to be out of the reach of deadly snakes, "even those that stand on each other's shoulders."

Pet lovers know where to go in Lake Wobegon: "For those of you who keep your cats cooped up all day while you're away, you'll want to stop down at Bertha's Kitty Boutique and look into recreational equipment for your animal. Bertha's has the little air hockey game that can keep a cat occupied for hours."

NOT TO BE MISSED are the Lake Wobegon Piles, a major tourist attraction. Seems that the townspeople became concerned that the lake was leaking, so they dumped scrap autos, appliances, farm equipment and trash into the lake and created twin islands — now regarded as primitive art.

Keillor delights in reading listener mail on the air, however mundane. On a recent show taped at Swarthmore College, he pulled this one out: "Hello to John and Karen in Appleton, Wis. from David, who is here in Swarthmore

— Don't forget to remove *U.S. News and*



Garrison Keillor

World Report from coffee table when guests come."

A native of small-town Minnesota himself, Keillor draws out his tales of rural America

slowly, almost painfully. It is a program that shuffles along, and you may wait awhile for something to happen. It is the laziest two hours on the air, and that is precisely its appeal for listeners who need a refreshing pause from radio's headlong dash through the Frantic 40.

I'm even getting a hankering for some of those Powdermilk Biscuits.

Channel hopping

Soccer fans will have to turn to cable again this year for some action. ESPN will televise 10 live regular-season NASL games this season, beginning with Portland-Tampa Bay on May 15. ABC Sports has acquired TV rights to the World Cup finals in Madrid on July 11.

Channel 9's Bob Doerr has come out with a new edition of his movie guide for parents who want to know more about the movies currently airing on cable and subscription TV to determine whether they should allow the kids to watch. Viewers can obtain a free copy by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to Doerr to the Movies, WCPO-TV, 500 Central Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.

If you're a Mike Douglas fan, you'll have to watch him on cable now. He's replaced Lee Leonard as host of "People Now," an hour-long interview show airing on Atlanta's Channel 17 nightly at 10. Douglas recently saw his nationally syndicated talk-variety show shot out from under him by a dwindling Nielsen rating.