

PICK OF THE DAY

Gentle tales from a raconteur of the first water

LAKE Wobegone is a Minnesota town which time forgot and the decades cannot improve — where all the men are good looking, the women strong and the kids above average. It's a town whose populace probably wouldn't listen to *A Prairie Home Companion* and one which is, in fact, entirely mythical. Yet it lives in the minds of millions of radio listeners through the gentle and magical storytelling ability of its creator, Garrison Keillor.

Inhabitants of Lake Wobegone seem real enough in spite of the tall story element in Keillor's relating of their doings. He is a humourist and raconteur of the first water. Usually recorded in the

A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION
On ABC-FM at 5 pm.

Theatre in St Paul, Minnesota, and broadcast live at 5pm Midwestern time to over 250 public radio stations across America. *A Prairie Home Companion* is an old-time radio show with a 1930s style that is agreeable here, too.

A mixture of humorous narrative, folksy anecdotes and down-home music, it also features messages from zany sponsors such as Bertha's Kitty Boutique, Deep Valley Beds — with that old fashioned sa-a-a-ag in the

middle — and Powdermilk Biscuits, a product that gives shy persons the strength to get up and do what needs to be done.

Or, as the jingle suggests: "If your family's tried 'em you know you've satisfied 'em they're a real hot item... Powdermilk!"

The show tours from time to time in the manner of the old-time radio shows but is beamed by satellite across America and to Australia. The paradox of the technology involved makes it even more more-ish.

Keillor, billed as America's tallest humorist, sounds like the late Lee Hayes of the Weavers and conjures images of Burl Ives. Far from craggy, he looks more like an extruded David



Combe with straight hair, but that may be an unfair description if it spoils images listeners have conjured from, say, a Thurber drawing.

The house pianist, Butch Thompson (America's Most Relaxed Man), is another of the show's greatest assets, laying down a chunky line of barrelhouse, stride, strut or boogie funk as required.

The show's American following is estimated at over two million.

"Fifty million Elvis fans can't be wrong," was one of the great lies of the 60s but these two million find it worth waiting for each week.

If you long for the good old days of gathering round the set, join them.

Doug Anderson

Garrison Keillor, humourist and raconteur of tall tales