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# People



Dressed in his typical 'Prairie Home Companion' garb, Garrison Keillor entertains his audience with familiar tales of Lake Wobegon.

## Our Prairie Home Companion

COLLEGEVILLE — Garrison Keillor took his 'A Prairie Home Companion' radio show to St. John's University Saturday and said he was happy to be here, so close to Lake Wobegon.

"It's just north of here," he said, of the mythical town that time forgot.

You head up through Holdingford, and look for the Holstenes, and when you get to the grove with the revolving wheel in front of it, that's my home — Lake Wobegon."

He described it as "the land of warm-hearted people — although it may take 20 or 30 years to get that way." It is one of the few remaining places where people do not need a life style.

Keillor performed live for Minnesota Public Radio from the St. John's football field as part of St. John's Preparatory School's 125th anniversary.

An audience of about 2,000 people looked in the stands, laughing at Keillor's one-liners and tapping their toes to music by the Booth-Thompson Trio, the Boys of the Lough and the Third Generation Finnish Family Band. Vern Sutton, wearing a red, white and blue striped tie, also sang several patriotic tunes.

Members of the audience got into the act as well, tossing pine-needles and footballs and even dancing on the field near the stage while the show played on. Observing all the activity around him, Keillor at one point very suggestively suggested that he had become "a three-ring circus." He did not appear to mind, however, understanding how rambunctious Lake Wobegonians folk get around the Fourth of July. Lake Wobegon has a Fourth celebration second only to St. Joseph's, he said. The one difference is that in Lake Wobegon the parade goes around one city block four times so that everyone

can participate and also be spectators.

Keillor, whose folksy show has become quite the rage over the last eight years and now is broadcast on 212 National Public Radio stations, got his start at St. John's with Minnesota Public Radio affiliate KSRB-FM.

He lived on a farm in Freeport back then and obviously has not forgotten the area, although the last time he did a show in Central Minnesota was about four years ago.

In the meantime, he has been making a big name for himself in such unlikely places — for a Lake Wobegon, at least — as New York, Boston and Los Angeles. He recently returned from a tour to the West Coast, after rave reviews in national newspapers.

Apparently he has not gotten too uppity, though, noting that he was eager to head to the Charterbox Cafe in Lake Wobegon after the show and eat the special dinner — last week's leftovers — that Shirley was cooking for him.

Wearing his typical attire — beige suit, straw hat, round glasses and sandals — Keillor charmed the audience with Stearns County nostalgia.

He even recited several popular German tunes, including:

*Du, du liegst mir im Herzen,  
Du, du liegst mir im Sinn,  
Du machst mir viel Schmerzen,  
Weil ich nicht weiß, was ich dir bin.  
Ja, ja, Weil ich nicht weiß, was ich dir bin,  
Du liegst in my heart.  
You, you are on my mind.  
You, you make me ache.  
You do not know how good you are for me.  
You, you, you, you.  
You do not know how good you are for me?"*

His special brand of humor, however, was the main drawing card.

Keillor/10A



Producer Margaret Moss finds time back stage to laugh at one of Keillor's stories.



A backstage worker operates the control panel that sends 'A Prairie Home Companion' sounding over the National Public Radio airwaves.



With the show over, Keillor waves goodbye to the audience at St. John's.

Story/Sylvie Lang  
Photos/Steve Wolt

Mother Angelica inspects equipment at the Eternal Word Television Network.

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# Keillor—

Keillor provided what the audience wanted, including a few good-natured cracks at Roman Catholic religious orders — appropriately, since St. John's is a Benedictine institution.

He referred to the Order of St. Ed, for example, named after St. Ed the Capable, whose members empty ashtrays and unclog drains "all in the knowledge that the Lord did not mean for all of us to be intellectuals."

Father Emil, pastor of the Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility in Lake Wobegon, was not too stupid, however, Keillor said.

On the Fourth of July, Father Emil would set off three fire rockets on the church steps. When people would come running to the church to find out what had happened, Father Emil would say, "Come in. (The rosary) has just started."

While Keillor performed on stage, a

former St. Cloud woman performed much of the behind-the-scenes work necessary for the two-hour show.

Margaret Moos, producer of the show, talked with technicians, gave performers cues and kept the show running according to schedule.

What has made the "Prairie Home Companion" show swell in popularity is that so many people who listen to it or watch it can identify with small-town living, said Moos, 37, a 1963 graduate of Cathedral High School.

"We get so many letters from people who say they have had a pastor like Father Emil or knew a family like the Bunsens (a mythical family often referred to on the show)," Moos said.

These people may live in big cities now, but they do not forget their roots in the collective small town that is Lake Wobegon, she said. A popular theory is that Lake Wobegon is mainly based on Freeport, because Keillor used to live there, but, according to Moos, "Lake Wobegon is a mixture of many small towns."

Moos has worked with the show since its beginnings in 1974, first as a promoter and later as producer.

Her current duties include budgeting, long-range planning and booking talent.

The show started out small, with performances in an 82-seat auditorium in the Variety Hall Theater in Lowertown St. Paul, but has continually expanded and now uses the 860-seat auditorium at St. Paul's World Theater as its home base.

About 2 million people listen to the show on their radios each week, according to Moos.

The show has caught on so much that it has been sought out for tours on the East and West coasts.

"We get probably 100 pieces of mail today, from all over the U.S.," she said. "It's great to see, after all those years of digging potatoes."

Margaret Moos is one of two St. Cloud Moos sisters who now work for Minnesota Public Radio. Kate Moos, 28, recently joined KSJR as a reporter.