

RADIO



Wobegon Weather

**Garrison Keillor
has been under
it lately, from
north to south**

*Of Suanna, O, don't you cry for me
I'm gone to Alabama for a couple of
days to ski.*

—Garrison Keillor,
March 13, 1993

By MIKE SWEENEY
FORT WORTH STAFF WRITER

FORT WORTH — It has been a quiet week in Fort Worth, Texas, my hometown.

Started off quiet. Stayed quiet. Didn't get the latest gossip from the good folks up in Lake Wobegon, Minn., the fictional hometown of radio humorist and storyteller Garrison Keillor.

Maybe things'll change tomorrow, when Keillor's American Radio Company gives a fund-raising performance for KERA/90.1 FM at the Will Rogers Auditorium.

It won't be broadcast. Kind of a Zen concept — a radio show that you have to see. 'Cause out there in radio land, if it be silence, lemme tell ya.

Kinda like the way it was this week at the old Star-Telegram.

Sure, the publicist fella said over the phone, he could set up a chat with Keillor. Monday OK? Fine. Monday came and went. Nothing.

Tuesday? Sure, let's try for Tuesday.

Again nothing.

Wednesday, a near miss at 2 p.m. An aide hoped to have Keillor call from his car phone (GARRISON KEILLOR HAS A CAR PHONE?!), but the ball was bobbed. Tinker to Evers to Ch—oops! A long shot at a Wednesday night interview was a washout, and then the next opportunity was too late.

But you can hardly blame Keillor, or his publicist. Between the first attempts to set up an interview with America's tallest radio comedian and the day the first call was expected, there was a live show in Birmingham, Ala., eagerly awaited by roughly 250 public radio stations (including KERA, where Keillor is heard from 5 to 7 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to noon Sunday).

The March 13 broadcast came in the middle of the worst blizzard in Birmingham's history — which dumped 17 inches of snow in 24 hours and dropped temperatures to 2 degrees. Some folks on the radio team had to fly to Atlanta and drive to Birmingham in the snowstorm, but "fortunately we're Minnesotans," one said.

"This is what we came down here to get away from," Keillor told the crowd that managed to trek to the Alabama Theater.

"Wake up this morning and downtown was empty. There were just two tracks through the snow. And in the street, just a few people walking down the street. Drifts about 2, 3 feet high in front of the hotel. There was a convention of lawyers in the hotel. They were all down in the lobby wondering what would become of them. I wondered if maybe it was when God noticed that there was a lawyer convention in town that the idea of a snowstorm first occurred to him.

"Personally I believe that a snowstorm in Birmingham in the middle of March is God's way of saying that you may think that you can decide if you live in the South or the North, but actually he's going to decide. You can be in Birmingham if you want to, but if God says it's North Dakota, then it's North Dakota."

The broadcast was easygoing, even by Keillor's standards. Keillor tried to arrange rides for some people in the audience, and he thanked somebody's mother for pitching in to work the lights. Musical guest Emmylou Harris missed the start of the show after a nine-hour bus ride from Nashville.

Chris Bannion, publicist for American Radio Company, said later that the snow closed the airport and delayed the radio troupe's departure from Alabama for well over a day. The return trip got held up for four hours in Cincinnati, and the flight didn't arrive in St. Paul, Minn., home base of American Radio Company, until 5 p.m. Monday, leaving Keillor and cast feeling strung out, Bannion said.

Then it was time to get ready for

More on KEILLOR on Page 7

Garrison Keillor presents a non-broadcast special edition of his American Radio Company at 7 p.m. tomorrow at Will Rogers Auditorium, Fort Worth.



Keillor

Continued from Page 1

a live show today in Tulsa, Okla., and the performance in Fort Worth. The latter will feature San Antonio singer/songwriter Tish Hinojosa and the *American Radio Company* regulars: Ivy Austin, Rob Fisher, the Broadway Local Theatre and the Demitasse Orchestra (which, appropriately, is smaller than Keillor's Coffee Club Orchestra).

So if Keillor was a bit too busy to call to answer the same old questions, that's understandable.

And maybe just as well. The press and Keillor have had an electrically charged history.

In the March/April *Columbia Journalism Review* he is quoted as saying he cut his ties to *The New Yorker* because newly hired editor Tina Brown isn't interested in serious writing, and "is the wrong person to edit it. I didn't want to be on the premises to watch it suffer under her hand."

In October, *U.S. News & World Report* said Keillor provoked "a polite yawn" with his return to St. Paul after a self-imposed exile (initiated, by the way, after his clash with the city's daily newspaper). The magazine also said the scatological humor in Keillor's latest book irked

a few in the Twin Cities.

The offending novel, *W.L.T.: A Radio Romance*, includes a scene in which angry listeners pelt a self-important radio announcer with clods of manure, including a 20-pound blockbuster dropped from above that knocks the man down and ends his career.

Another media plugger cow-chipped into oblivion.

"The press isn't an irritant," Keillor says in a press packet that publicist Bannon put in the mail. "I'm one of the press, don't forget, and when I complain about the press, I'm not being thin-skinned, I am simply trying to uphold the high standards of my own profession."

Still, as we think about that 20-pound cow chip — dubbed "the Moneymaker" — we can only say that it's OK.

It's OK, Mr. Keillor, about the connections we missed. We know the chips were down this week.

The non-broadcast special edition of Garrison Keillor's *American Radio Company* will be at 7 p.m. tomorrow at Will Rogers Auditorium, Fort Worth. Tickets at Ticketmaster are \$29.75, or \$24.75 for KERA members. To also attend a reception with Keillor at Fort Worth's Radisson Plaza after the show, the tickets are \$87.75, or \$77.75 for KERA members.