

BACK HOME ON THE PRAIRIE

Garrison Keillor, then and now

■ **1971**
Poet and writer Garrison Keillor begins daily "Prairie Home Morning Program" on KSJN-FM, mixing eclectic recorded music with stories about Lake Wobegon, Minn.

■ **1974**
Keillor starts broadcasting Saturday night show, "A Prairie Home Companion," with live music, on KSJN

■ **1979**
World Theater in St. Paul becomes home of "A Prairie Home Companion"

■ **1980**
"Prairie Home Companion" goes into national distribution via American Public Radio

■ **1981**
"PHC" wins George Foster Peabody Award

■ **1984**
PHC moves to St. Paul's Orpheum Theatre because World Theater is literally falling on performers' heads

■ **1985**
Keillor publishes "Lake Wobegon Days," makes cover of Time magazine; renovation of World Theater begins, with help from Legislature and low-interest loan from city of St. Paul

■ **1986**
World Theater reopens

■ **1987**
Keillor stops production of PHC, moves to Denmark, then New York City

■ **1989**
Keillor launches new public-radio series, "American Radio Company," in New York

■ **1992**
Keillor moves base of operations back to St. Paul

■ **1993**
Keillor revives "A Prairie Home Companion"



Look who's comin' through that door: 'Companion' returns

By Noel Holston/Staff Writer

On "American Radio Company" last season, when Garrison Keillor was broadcasting live from his old haunt, the World Theater in St. Paul, there were times when he almost blurted out the other name.

"After singing the first verse of the theme song," Keillor said in a recent interview, "when I'd come to the place where I say, 'Hello, everybody, and welcome to . . .,' the name 'A Prairie Home Companion' would be on my lips.

"And I really wanted to say it. But then I said, 'American Radio Company.'"

Saturday, when Keillor begins a new season of shows at the World, he'll go ahead and say it out loud.

Six years after discontinuing the public-radio variety show that was his ticket to national stardom, four years after starting a new program in New York, one year after moving his base of operations back to St. Paul, Keillor is reclaiming the title "A Prairie Home Companion" and reemphasizing folk music.

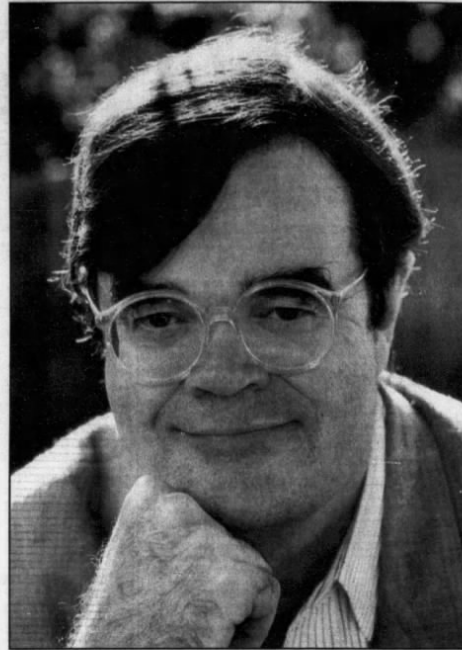
To celebrate and promote the occasion, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) is throwing a "Welcome Back, Prairie Home" street party today in St. Paul on Exchange St., between Wabasha and Cedar Aves., starting at 7 p.m. with live music by the original Powdermilk Biscuit Band (Bob Douglas, Dick Rees, Mary DuShane and Adam Granger) and by frequent "Companion" guests Kate MacKanzie, Peter Ostroushko, Butch Thompson, Bill Hinkley and Judy Larson.

At 8 p.m., Keillor is to narrate a big-screen slide show of the history of "A Prairie Home Companion," after which Dan Newton and Jumbo Ya-Ya will play Cajun dance music.

For \$5, revelers can fuel up on a mashed potato and meatloaf dinner. Sweet corn, fittingly, will be served free to all.

Why now?
The only thing about Keillor's decision that's surprising is that he took so long to make it. "A Prairie Home Companion" was an object of near-idolatrous devotion to many of its listeners, and MPR's merchandising subsidiaries sold Prairie Home and Powdermilk paraphernalia by the carload.

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On Saturday, Garrison Keillor plans to greet his radio listeners with a phrase he hasn't used since 1987: "Hello, everybody, and welcome to 'A Prairie Home Companion.'" He says his show's old title, which he adapted from the Prairie Home cemetery in Moorhead, Minn., is a memorable name that "wears well."



Holston/ Music will be more prominent in show

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"I knew all along that from a promotional point of view, 'A Prairie Home Companion' would have been a better choice, but I simply wanted to have some real feeling for the name before I went back to it," Keillor said.

"When I thought about coming back to radio with a Saturday night show in '88, I felt it would have been a cynical business decision to have picked up the name 'A Prairie Home Companion.' I wanted to come back to radio, but I was not coming back to resume that show necessarily and to go back and try to put that back together.

"So I chose a different name. But, over the past four seasons, certainly it was clear to me that the name 'A Prairie Home Companion' was stronger in people's minds than 'American Radio Company,' which I chose deliberately for its sort of institutional sound.

For the record, Keillor adapted the name from a Moorhead, Minn., cemetery, which he chanced upon on a trip to Fargo, N.D., around

Guest list for new 'Companion' shows

Guests for the first five shows of "A Prairie Home Companion," all of which will originate from the World Theater, 10 E. Exchange St., St. Paul at 4:45 p.m.:

Saturday/ Guitarist Leo Kottke and singer Tish Hinojosa.

Oct. 9/ "Hand" musician John Twomey and guitarist Martin Simpson.

Oct. 16/ Pianist Butch Thompson and the Chenille Sisters vocal trio.

Oct. 23/ Fairfield Four gospel quintet and traditional musicians Jay Ungar and Molly Mason.

Oct. 30/ St. Paul Chamber Orchestra conducted by Hugh Wolff, mandolin and fiddle player Peter Ostroushko, Butch Thompson.

Tickets: \$16 to \$22. 989-5151

1970.

"The idea of naming a cemetery the Prairie Home really touched me," Keillor said. "I think I tried to write a poem about it, but I was coming to the end of my poetry 'life' and, not succeeding at that, I named a show after it."

Folk ways

Music, especially folk music, will be much more prominent on "Prairie Home Companion" than it was on "American Radio Company."

"I think I pushed music to the rear," Keillor he said. "I did that because I love to write comedy scripts and little radio dramas like 'Lonesome Radio Theater.'

"But over the summer, listening to the show in my kitchen as I was cooking, I was startled to hear how much more the music appealed to me and made me feel happy as I was chopping vegetables," he said. "And how 'Lonesome Radio' scripts — scripts that in rehearsal seemed to me so funny and, in the

theater, made the audience laugh a lot — seemed weaker on the radio.

"I want to bring music back into the forefront, and the music will take a step toward the sort of acoustic music that people heard more of on 'A Prairie Home Companion.' Not exclusively. We'll have some of [Rob Fisher's] Coffee Club Orchestra, but I want to get back into that broad, broad field that is lumped under 'folk' music.

"I'm looking forward to having people like Peter Rowan back on, and Jean Redpath and Leo Kottke."

Kottke will be on Saturday's show, along with Tish Hinojosa, a young Hispanic singer from Texas whom Keillor heard on a visit to Ft. Worth.

'Home' to stay?

Although Keillor has decided, for the time being at least, that there's no place like "Home," one can't help wondering how long it'll be before the grind gets to him.

Keillor said he thinks he's better prepared now than he was during the original run of "A Prairie Home Companion." Back then, he said, "I had what now strikes me as a weird obsession with counting the popcorn boxes myself and making sure the microphones were properly numbered.

"I'm exaggerating, but if you concern yourself with everything and think about it and brood about it, you very quickly wear yourself out.

"The key to survival is the people who work with you. I wasn't smart enough to know that before."

"A Prairie Home Companion" is broadcast on Saturdays at 4:45 p.m. by KSJN-FM (99.5) and other Minnesota Public Radio stations

Today's TV

Continued from preceding page

Countdown at the Neon Armadillo/ Doug Stone; Chris Le Doux; Billy Dean; Victoria Shaw; Mark Collie. 1367130

(11:05pm) Arsenio Hall/Kenny G; comedian Thes Vidale; actor Robert Pastorelli; Shawn Newman, the Alphabet Man. (cc) 5803807

(11:15pm) The Tonight Show/Meat Loaf; Valerie Bertinelli. (cc) 5894159

Late night broadcast movies/

2:05am

Movie/The Incredible Rocky Mountain Race.—Mark Twain and Mike Fink race each other from Missouri to California, any way they can. 1977. 115m. ** 94736260

3:05am

Movie/The Naked Prey.—A 19th-century safari guide runs for his life as 10 African warriors try to hunt him down. 1966. 205m.

*** 52637666

Radio/

Noon

KNOW (91.1) A look at local arts and pop culture, on **First Friday**.

7:05pm

WCCO (630) Baseball/Minnesota Twins vs. Seattle.