

# World of Lake Wobegon To Meander Into Civic Center

By Rick Rogers  
Staff Writer

Tim Russell's face may only be familiar to his family and friends, but anyone who considers himself "A Prairie Home Companion" regular will immediately recognize Russell's distinctive voice. The problem is, he keeps changing it according to the demands of each radio sketch.

One minute he lapses into a cowboy drawl for a western sketch and the next, he "becomes" former presidential candidate Ross Perot. In between, Russell peppers his routines with the voices of Ted Koppel, Mr. Rogers and Jack Nicholson, even Edith Bunker and Julia Child.

The Minnesota resident spent 20 years as a radio announcer and voice-over artist but for the past three years, his talents have added a special luster to "A Prairie Home Companion," Garrison Keillor's popular radio show.

Known as "the man of a thousand voices," Russell may well be radio's answer to Lon Chaney, an actor whose chameleon-like appearance earned him the title "man of a thousand faces." Russell's arsenal includes everything from foreign accents to celebrity impressions.

In a special collaboration between local public radio station KCSC (90.1 FM) and the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities, Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" will be presented live in concert from 5 to 7 p.m. Saturday at the Civic Center Music Hall.

Special musical guests Arlo Guthrie, Byron Berline and the student choir from the Classen School of Advanced Studies will be featured.

Keillor, a noted author who has become a household name thanks to his "News from Lake Wobegon" sketches, has hosted "A Prairie Home Companion" for nearly two de-



Tim Russell, Sue Scott and Garrison Keillor on stage during a live broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion."

acades. The centerpiece of each broadcast is Keillor's homespun monologue about ordinary Midwesterners who inhabit the fictional town of Lake Wobegon.

Keillor's rare ability to spin his fantastic tales has kept audiences tuning in week after week to learn of the continuing developments in Lake Wobegon. Part of the appeal is Keillor's unique appraisal of these small-town residents. He ends each segment with "That's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, the men are good looking and all the children are above average."

Russell said in a recent interview that his association with "A Prairie Home Companion" came quite by accident. Well-known to listeners in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Russell was invited to substitute for a "Prairie Home" regular one week-

## "A Prairie Home Companion"

**When:** 5 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Civic Center Music Hall

**Tickets:** \$20, \$30, \$40 and \$50

**Information:** 297-3000

end and simply stayed on.

While many listeners might assume radio to be more leisurely than television, Russell said the company never sees the current week's sketches until the day before the broadcast. And while that prevents over-rehearsing, it also puts considerable pressure on the actors. Unlike a stage or screen actor who has weeks or months to learn and polish a script, Russell never knows until the last minute exactly which voices he'll be using for a particular sketch.

"That's what makes it so much fun," Russell said recently. "The actors and ac-

tresses on the show are basically voice-over people. Our skills are to be able to make an acting choice in short order without a lot of direction. Bringing all the cultural references to the plate is fun for us. If Garrison is hearing something else, he'll make a suggestion that will help us find what he's hearing in his mind."

Russell was an English major in college then went to law school for about six months before realizing that a legal career was not his destiny.

"At that point, I thought, 'What does an English major do?' It's an age-old que-

See LAKE, Page 2

# Lake

a  
s  
n  
y  
r  
k  
t  
o  
l  
t  
t  
o  
e  
e  
I

**From Page 1**  
ry. I had to assess what skills I had and the one thing I knew I could do was voices. I wanted to do voice-over work and that's how I got into radio."

The nationally syndicated "A Prairie Home Companion" is heard today on more than 360 public radio stations. And with some 2.1 million listeners each week, it has become one of the nation's most popular radio shows. As for its continued appeal, Russell says he's convinced heredity plays an important factor.

"We have a lot of

kids who come up after the show and say almost to a fault that they listened to the show because their parents or grandparents did while riding in the car. I think every family can relate to the universal traits that pop up in Garrison's writing.

"There's a similarity that cuts through all social strata when it comes to visiting Grandma and Grandpa or a crazy aunt and uncle. Garrison pretty much has his finger on the human condition."

While most impressionists have had few opportunities to showcase their talent since the disappearance of television variety

shows, Russell considers himself lucky to be able to exploit his craft on radio.

"It's got to be the best job in show business for us," Russell said. "It's like Christmas every weekend for us to come in and see a great script and know that you're going to get a great reaction from an audience. That can't be topped."

In addition to the live stage show at the Civic Center, KCSC will present a simultaneous broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" from 5 to 7 p.m. Saturday as well as a rebroadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Sunday.



Garrison Kellor

<b>LJ TOUR SERVICE</b>	
<b>CASINO BUS TOURS</b>	
BLOOMINGDALE, MS • FIVE • JUNE 22-JULY 3	
TUNICA, MS	TUNICA, MS