



Transylvania College and the Prairie Home Companion

GARRISON Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* has been one of the most popular radio programs in America since 1974, which is also broadcast overseas on the Armed Forces Radio Network. It is a delightful mix of homespun American humor and some of the best folk, country, bluegrass, and gospel music heard anywhere. Based in St. Paul, Minnesota, its Saturday night broadcasts are heard by an estimated four million loyal listeners. It is arguably the most listened-to radio program in the nation. Frequently it travels and broadcasts a live program in other cities around the U.S. and overseas.

My long-time employer, Transylvania College has a name associated with Hollywood produced horror films, which the school frequently exploits. The Virginia-based Transylvania Company was named after the Transylvania region of Romania and Hungary in the old world. Some of Hollywood's horror story characters were named after real-life villains and terrorists, such as Vlad, the Impaler, who was the model for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The name Transylvania means "Across the woods," a forested mountainous region in the Balkans.

Apparently, Garrison Keillor heard of Transylvania College and thought its auditorium would be an especially appropriate site from which to broadcast his *Prairie Home Companion* on a Halloween. What a great opportunity for the college to get free national exposure! So he contacted the President at Transylvania to ask permission, but was refused; he had never heard of him or his program.

Two years later, Garrison Keillor brought his *Prairie Home Companion* to Lexington, a few blocks from Transylvania, to the University of Kentucky, which welcomed him. There was standing room only the night of the broadcast, and hundreds of people were turned away because the large auditorium was filled beyond capacity. It was the most successful and popular program ever staged at the University of Kentucky, and Lexington. I think of this missed opportunity every time I hear the *Prairie Home Companion*, and like myriads of others, shake my head in disbelief.

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