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THE FIRST
50
YEARS
OF MINNESOTA
PUBLIC RADIO

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PUBLIC RADIO



SIGNAL STRENGTH

The First Fifty Years of Minnesota Public Radio

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Produced in the United States of America

For all those who have dreamed of
what Minnesota Public Radio could be
and worked to bring this dream to life
during its first fifty years.

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Foreword by

Walter Mondale

Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) has linked our state together for fifty years. It has brought together the best thinking of our citizens, the important news, the live events, the culture, the humor and the pathos to help us understand ourselves. And it has taken the best of that and sent it to people throughout the nation and the world.

This book tells the story of how unlikely it was that MPR should have happened at all. It also tells the story of the many times that MPR superbly served its role of bringing us together, making us stronger, and providing us with a clear identity as Minnesotans and Midwesterners.

We have been fortunate—even lucky—that we have had MPR. It's there every day on multiple channels with hundreds of hours of programming. It's there in my home town of Elmore, MN and virtually every other town and city in this region. Begun almost by chance, and then nurtured by great board leadership, management, staff, and the contributions of thousands of listeners.

In the beginning, a Benedictine monk named Colman J. Barry, OSB was about to become the president of Saint John's University in 1964. This was at the beginning of the Vietnam war, the

polarization of the civil rights movement, the new horizons of the space program, the assassinations of our leaders, the continuation of the cold war with Cuba at its center, the advent of a new form of message music that took the younger generation by storm, and the flowering of the era of free love on the west coast. Father Colman, at risk of being barricaded in his office over war protests and civil rights issues, looked to the future. How could Saint John's reach out to the community that surrounded it and bring the best thinking, the important and accurate news, and the best of our culture—and thus educate the broader citizenry in the way that the college was trying to educate its students?

Radio was his conclusion. Non-commercial, educational radio. In an unlikely and opportunistic move, he tapped a graduating student to start a radio station in an industry that neither of them knew much about. He raised the funds to get equipment and permits. He went to the governing council of the University and Abbey and asked for carte blanche authority to move forward. All based on his intuition that this could work and that it would make a difference.

Fifty years later, his intuition has grown from a three employee start-up in Collegeville to the most powerful regional public radio center in the country. It was a leader in establishing almost every national public radio entity, from National Public Radio (NPR) to American Public Media (APM). What this story tells us as it unfolds is that, as Father Colman said in 1981, "Sometimes dreams do come true". He proved that, with belief, trust, competency, clear mission, patience, hard work and

enthusiastic support, people can create a major asset for their community. This great book is the story of one of Minnesota's most remarkable successes.

Walter Mondale, a Minnesota native, has served as Minnesota attorney general, United States Senator, Vice President of the United States, Democratic candidate for President of the United States, and Ambassador to Japan.

Introduction

Considering the place Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) holds today in the hearts of millions of listeners, it's hard to imagine a time before Americans had nationwide access to public radio, a time when even FM seemed futuristic.

When MPR first went on the air on January 22, 1967, it joined Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR, 1917), Boston Public Radio (WGBH, 1951), and a few other non-profit radio stations dedicated to serving their local communities by providing news and cultural programming. NPR didn't exist. About half of domestic cars had air conditioning, but hardly any had FM or stereo sound. In all of Stearns County, where MPR began, there were probably fewer than 100 FM radios.

The timing of MPR's launch was no coincidence. Many of the tremendous social, technological, and political changes that make 1967 feel like a year from a completely different era were getting off to a dramatic start. Congress was debating the expansion of the Vietnam War, and riots across the country and in Minnesota were drawing broad attention to rising political, social and racial turbulence. Steadily increasing power of computers was giving immediate access to information, NASA was accumulating triumphs and pursuing its quest to reach the moon by the end of the decade, and increasingly sophisticated recording techniques were changing the human experience. All would have been nearly impossible to foresee in the America of just a few years earlier.

The people of Stearns County had as much of a stake in state, national, and global events as anyone else, and something new was brewing in rural central Minnesota, too.

In 1964, Father Colman J. Barry, OSB, became president of Saint John's University. A small liberal arts campus in Collegeville, Minnesota, Saint John's was one of the oldest educational institutions in the Midwest, founded on the grounds of an active Benedictine abbey surrounded by woods, rolling prairies, and the farms of mainly German immigrants. Father Colman was a monk who thought deeply about the future—especially about Saint John's obligations to its broader community and how the University could serve central Minnesota.

The Saint John's campus sits on the eastern end of Stearns County, a largely rural area with fewer than 100,000 people in 1967. The county had a few colleges, a state university, and the population centers of Saint Cloud and Sauk Centre, the hometown of novelist and playwright Sinclair Lewis. But it was far enough from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul that its people couldn't easily participate in the cultural life there.

Father Colman knew, deeply, the value the Benedictines placed on education as an opportunity for Saint John's to fulfill its mission to support intellectual, spiritual, and emotional advancement. He and his fellow monks felt a duty not only to deepen the inner worlds of their students, but also to improve the lives of their neighbors and serve the public in nearby communities. Their outreach already included teaching, advancing the arts and sciences, and hosting celebrations of the spirit. And Father Colman suspected there might be yet another way: radio.

Some colleges and universities across the country already had educational radio stations, including the University of Minnesota, and these early collegiate broadcasters and noncommercial, university-affiliated, radio stations were transmitting a mix of informational, cultural and instructional programming.

At that time, “radio” essentially meant AM radio. Broadcasters had been



experimenting with FM for decades, with waxing and waning enthusiasm. But FM radio, with its promise of high fidelity and stereo sound, had begun a slow crawl toward modest popularity, and almost all the “underground radio” of the 1960s was found on FM.

Father Colman came to believe radio was the future and a strong signal could reach and serve central Minnesota. Along with his goal of increasing local access to the arts, culture, and knowledge about what was happening in the world, Father Colman also hoped to bring people in the communities near Collegeville together around discussions of what was beautiful and important in their own lives. A radio station could deliver these Benedictine gifts to people in all directions.

Most importantly, this radio station could serve its listeners well into the future. He foresaw a time when Minnesotans could celebrate their own regional culture and also increase their participation in the national and international exchange of ideas. The people of Stearns County would benefit from that kind of radio service, he was sure. And he was in a position to make it happen.

Exactly *how* to do it remained unclear until a remarkably confident and ambitious Saint John’s student named Bill Kling entered the picture. Together with Colman Barry and the people of Minnesota, they would create a new form of educational radio. Public radio—an entrepreneurial approach to public service broadcasting using, at young Kling’s urging, the unfamiliar technology of FM radio; an innovative use of noncommercial radio that no one could have predicted would set a new standard.

This unparalleled radio service would grow to influence all of broadcasting. It would create new program formats, launch prominent careers, devise new ways to distribute its offerings, and set new standards in technology, journalism, artistry, and entrepreneurship. Most importantly, the roots it established at Saint John’s University and in central Minnesota would mature to support a portfolio of broadcast and multimedia services responsible for informing,

inspiring, and entertaining listeners around the world.

And it all happened, especially in its earliest years, with no grand plan or deep pockets or particular expertise. The people who created and nurtured this radio service, which eventually become known as Minnesota Public Radio, or simply MPR, relied on intuition, a passion for the needs and aspirations of their listeners, and learning from experiments, successes and mistakes. MPR developed from the souls and brains and tireless dedication of its creators, supporters and thousands of volunteers.

This is a story about the first fifty years in the life of MPR.

It is the story of a small group of people who came together to create a service now used by more than 30 million people in Minnesota and throughout the nation and the world. MPR has become more than a radio station; for many people, it is a glue that bonds communities together, produces compelling programming and delivers trusted information listeners depend on to understand and make sense of the world around them.

This is also the story of an undertaking few predicted would flourish. It's a story of dreamers, of naiveté, of the force of personality, of generosity, of tireless dedication, and of taking chances. It is a story of a monk and university president whose devotion to Benedictine values led him to entrust an inexperienced graduating college student to build what became the nation's foremost public radio network. It's a story of success that came despite all advice and experience to the contrary. By good fortune, that student, Bill Kling, along with a crew of other students, recent Saint John's grads, and young people who came to Collegeville from other places, brought the talents and vision that made this enterprise actually happen.

Finally, this is a story of the luck and achievement of a band of journalists, board members, engineers, producers, musicians, members, programmers, managers, professional staff and volunteers. Listeners joined and supported them the whole way through. This story belongs to all of them.

CHAPTER 1



Visionaries Cross Paths

The story of Minnesota Public Radio begins at Saint John's University in Collegeville, MN, a community located near the center of the state.

In addition to being president and a professor at Saint John's University, and a monk in the Order of Saint Benedict, Father Colman Barry dreamed and schemed widely, and the projects he advanced moved at high speed. Although sometimes sketchy on details, he knew what he wanted to do, and he was especially adept at identifying people who could get things done. That's how he forged a strong partnership with Bill Kling, a class of 1964 economics major, in establishing public radio at Saint John's.

Kling had arrived at Saint John's in 1960, a multi-talented student who had built his own stereo system, edited his high-school yearbook, and took adventurous trips with fellow students at Cretin High School in Saint Paul. Serious about classwork yet popular and fun loving, Kling became co-manager of KSJU, the Saint John's inter-dorm student radio station with a hard-wired signal that didn't leave campus. He enjoyed making gadgets and using technology to rig up things in his dorm room: He constructed a transmitter to feed his fellow students rock and roll, a musical style banned on the campus station. He also wired his room to circumvent the University's 11 p.m. lights-out rule. When anyone opened the door, the lights would automatically go dark, like a refrigerator in reverse. Kling so brashly and determinedly made things

happen that Father Colman was fond of calling him James J. Kling, a reference to the Saint Paul railroad magnate James J. Hill.

Kling often joined Father Colman for speculative bull sessions. In the spring of 1964, Father Colman asked Kling what his plans were after graduation. Kling said he had no idea. Maybe he'd go to grad school in business or communications.

The conversation then veered to radio, a subject the two often discussed. Sometimes they talked about Kling's tinkering with a piece of radio equipment that was fairly exotic in the early 1960s, an FM receiver. Kling had frequently suggested an FM radio station for the University, a station with a high-quality signal could reach the entire region around Saint John's, unlike the campus-limited signal of the student station. At that time, Kling didn't know about Father Colman's forthcoming promotion to President; he thought he was simply having conversations with a trusted professor and advisor.

Father Colman was intrigued. Like Kling, he believed that a powerful radio service could help the University extend its mission to engage with local communities by increasing their access to current information and cultural events and by bringing people in the surrounding counties together.

Radio could open an opportunity for Saint John's to offer top-level programming to the region, as part of the Benedictine tradition of being conservators of education and culture for their surrounding communities. Father Colman's modern approach to new technology was aligned with the Benedictine commitment to supporting arts and culture, encouraging good ideas, and believing that worthy projects can outlive their creators.

Kling initially thought his conversations with Father Colman were just that—thinking out loud about a common interest. But then came a decisive moment. Father Colman made him a life-changing offer: “Go to the graduate school of your choice in communications and we'll pay for it—if you'll agree to come back and start a radio station for Saint John's that truly serves the public.”

Today, Kling wishes he could ask Father Colman, “What were you thinking?”



The arrival of FM radio made big waves on the St. John's Campus in the summer of 1966. Bill Kling, Dan Rieder, John Hovanec, Mike Obler, and Nancy Unger are pictured here on the cover of the Summer 1966 edition of The Off-Campus Record.

Whatever made you think you could take a college senior and ask him to go create NBC for you? You don't do that. You don't start there."

At the time, Kling kept his mouth shut, accepted the trust Father Colman placed in him, and after graduation set off for Boston University. Father Colman left the details of getting a station off the ground to Kling, who spent his graduate school years hanging around WGBH, the well-respected noncommercial station based in Boston, and writing a master's thesis (never finished) titled "The Effect of Controversial Program Content on the Local Radio Audience."

As he had promised, Kling returned early to Colledgeville in 1966, bringing experience in communications law, strategy, and operations with him. But he didn't bring home a diploma. (He finally received his master's degree from Boston University in 2000.) By that time, he was sure that the future of radio communications was FM. Others had told Father Colman that AM was the way to go for Saint John's—a nice small regional AM station. However, Father Colman was a dreamer, and Kling convinced him that FM had much greater potential for the community and would eventually overtake AM in audience. It did that in 1976. Eighty-five miles north of the urban Twin Cities, Saint John's would become an FM pioneer.



Bill Kling, station manager of the newly founded KSJR, takes a call in his office. 1967

Out of Thin Air

Back at Saint John's, the 24-year-old Kling pitched his station concept to the governing body of the Abbey—many of its members recently his professors. According to the formal proposal for what he called Saint John's University Broadcasting, Inc., “radio programming will be appropriate to the liberal arts nature of the University,” he wrote. “The emphasis will be on cultural, fine arts, public affairs, and general education programs. It is intended also to offer timely and informative national and international news and commentary on public issues, applying these issues to and indicating their significance to the local broadcast area.”

Considering that this new station could tap into few steady sources of news or music programming, that hardly anyone in Stearns County owned an FM radio, and that the fledgling enterprise did not yet have a studio, antenna, or frequency, Kling's plan was more than a bit of a stretch. Now, as Saint John's Director of Broadcasting, he had to make it all happen.

Father Colman lent vital administrative, creative, and financial support to the startup, but he could offer no technical advice. Kling discovered that “the theoretical physics of FM radio indicated that to reach the whole state you needed a 150,000 watt transmitter on top of the highest terrain.” But in practice the theory failed badly. Kling researched. He read books on acoustics and designed a studio complex for the top floor of Wimmer Hall, where the University's museum—with its stuffed bison and other exhibits—and the library were once located. With considerable skepticism, campus work crews built the studio as Kling designed it.

To get there, your only option was to climb three flights of stairs—a painful proposition when hauling something, like a heavy Ampex tape recorder or acres of carpet for acoustical purposes. A set of glass doors opened to a reception area, behind which was Kling’s sizable office, his recompense for having to spend the previous year on campus in a closet-sized room over the steaming campus kitchen. Down the hall to the right was a mailroom, and to the left

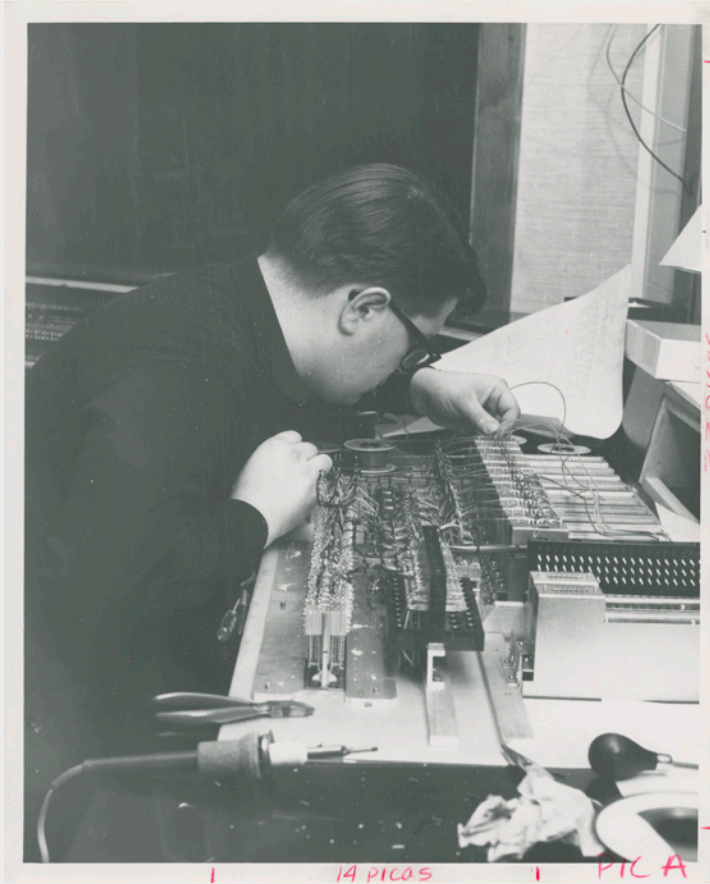


Colman Barry OSB and Bill Kling at the KSJR broadcast studios in Wimmer Hall, Saint John’s University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in 1967. They are pictured here reviewing the first issue of *Preview* magazine, the member-listener program guide that later became *Minnesota Monthly*.

was a large studio space containing a deficient grand piano and a Hammond B3 electronic organ that was never plugged in then—although it eventually became a mainstay of the Prairie Home Orchestra. Next came the control room, with windows looking into the large studio and a smaller announcer’s booth.

Farther down the hallway were the engineer’s office and a music library with floor-to-ceiling shelving for vinyl LPs. Behind a sound-locked door was a little vestibule connecting to an additional studio and the newsroom—the home of a chattering UPI teletype machine. The bathroom sink provided cold water only. Brick walls, natural wood trim, and blue carpeting were the limit of the facility’s decor. Stands of pines outside became abstract through the block glass windows.

The station’s custom-made control board, built by a local audio electronics wiz named D. Michael Shields, freely discharged static electricity to unwary operators. Walk across the room and touch it—you’d be zapped. Turn around to cue a record—you’d be zapped. Lean over in your chair to adjust the volume control—you’d be zapped. Shocks aside, in the days before digital recording



Engineer D. Michael Shields wiring the audio console for the first studio at Saint John's University, ca 1966.

and satellite uplinks, Shields and his transmission systems counterpart, Dan Rieder established some hybrid Saint John's University Broadcasting technology well ahead of the other broadcasters of the time in fidelity and transmitter sophistication. Rieder had picked up much of his technological wisdom in the Navy.

By the first weeks of 1967, the new station, named KSJR (the last three call letters standing for "Saint John's Radio"), was ready to go on the air with 40,000 watts of power. A main funder of the station—and its first financial

contributor—was Father Colman’s long-time friend and Saint John’s regent Dr. Waldemar Wenner, a prominent area ophthalmologist and surgeon who became the first secretary-treasurer of the board of the young radio service. “He was always there when we needed him,” Father Colman said of Wenner upon his death in 1981.

KSJR’s power was soon upped to 150,000 watts, making it the most powerful FM station in the state. (A 150,000-watt transmitter exceeds the power now allowed by the Federal Communications Commission, and

KSJR has since been reduced to 100,000 watts.) The station’s first-year capital and operating budget was just about \$95,000.

January 22, 1967 was launch day. The plan was that while Father Colman was dining with friends and supporters at the Saint Germain Hotel in Saint Cloud—about fifteen miles from Collegeville—he would switch on a portable radio, tune in to 90.1 FM, and hear KSJR’s premiere broadcast.

When Father Colman turned on the radio, though, he heard only static. This was strange: an earlier test broadcast, an engineer stating, “Heed my words, Earth people. You have ten minutes to live,” had gone fine. Much to his dismay, he and his dining companions were not going to be part of the first audience. Father Colman smoothed over the glitch and continued the dinner.

After five hours of troubleshooting and emergency soldering, Mike Shields solved the problem, “and then perhaps only because of the prayers of Father



Engineer Dan Rieder sitting on tower section during station construction.

Fintan Bromenshenkel, head of computer science at Saint John's, who paced the hall waiting and wishing he could offer assistance," Kling recalls.

At 9 p.m., the first broadcast went out. No microphones were working to allow for an announcement or an explanation of the station's new service. The small number of listeners, whoever they might have been, heard only an unannounced prerecorded "live" concert by the Cleveland Orchestra, which played from the transmitter building—a magnificent sound in the silence of a winter night in central Minnesota. By that time, Father Colman had turned off his radio. He was not among the very first listeners, but his enthusiasm for the new station wasn't dimmed.

Fortunately, Kling was more adept at programming the station than he was at avoiding technical mishaps. Sometimes KSJR featured Saint John's cultural and religious events, but Kling tried to hold the line at broadcasting the University's football games—until an enterprising former student engineer at Saint John's named Mark Durenberger suggested that the games could be broadcast in full, dramatic stereo sound. In letters written from his army post during the Vietnam War, Durenberger had commiserated with Kling on what could and should be done at the station. While those stereo broadcasts were in fact dramatic, they often seemed at odds immediately following a Handel oratorio.

Public affairs programs came from the Ford Hall Forum in Boston, the University of Chicago, Riverside Radio in New York, and the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, usually delivered through the mail on large reels of magnetic tape. News originated from wire services. By assembling stories out of many small news clips, it was possible to cobble together decent news programming.

The staple of the station's offerings, though, was classical music, including selections from the station's growing record library and taped concerts of the symphony orchestras of Boston, Cleveland, and Philadelphia. These concert

recordings were nearly all produced by commercial broadcasters, until the people at KSJR revised that equation. Before long, the new radio service was busy with the circulation of its own concert broadcasts.

Meanwhile, the first gathering of the board of directors of Saint John's University Radio, Inc., took place in the Saint Cloud law offices of Hughes, Hughes, and Hughes on August 1, 1967. Father Colman chaired the meeting. Little happened to suggest that in a half-century's time, this radio enterprise would be one of the nation's largest and most respected public radio broadcasters. The board merely went through the formalities of approving the certificate of incorporation, okaying the by-laws, and electing officers before adjourning.

The board consisted of three people dedicated to KSJR's success: Father Colman, who served as president; Fred J. Hughes, who had established a law practice in Saint Cloud more than 30 years earlier and officiated as vice-president; and the secretary-treasurer, Waldemar Wenner, M.D., the station's original financial supporter. Together they established governing policies for Saint John's University Radio, Inc., forming an organization that would revolutionize public broadcasting.

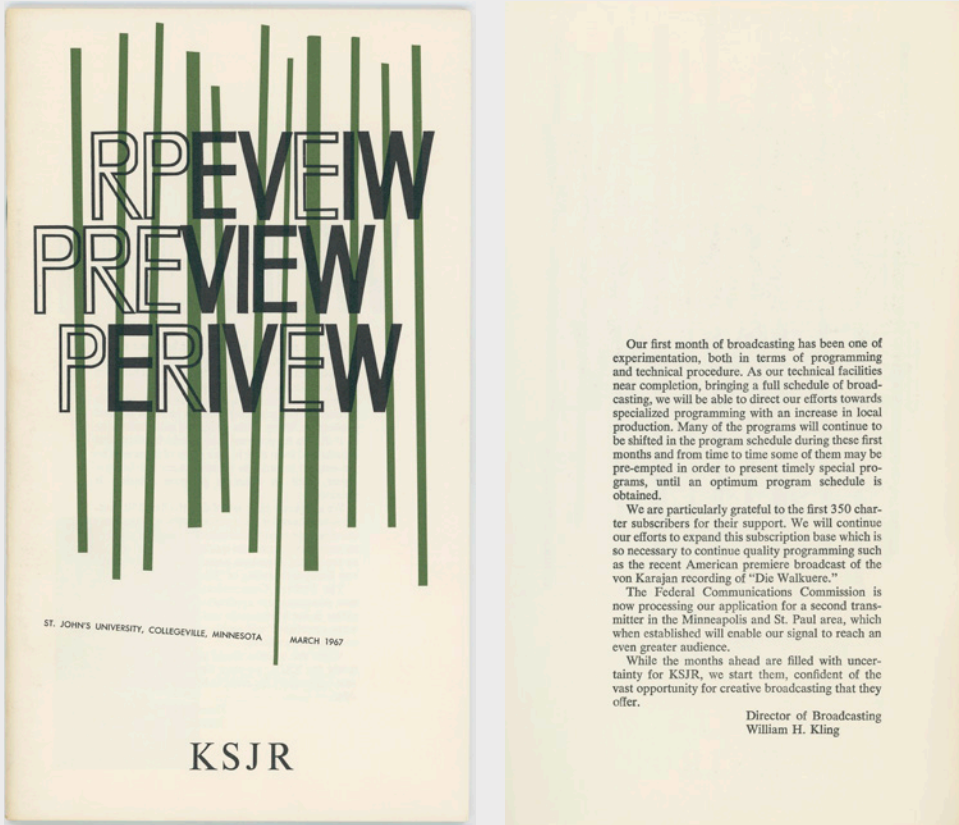
Unsuspecting Pioneers

Many long-time MPR employees got their start during the early days of KSJR.

Among the first people brought in to work at KSJR was a Saint John's student, Tom Kigin, who had grown up in Saint Cloud. Kigin was sitting in his study hall one day in the fall when someone came down the hall looking for a student with experience editing a newspaper or magazine. Because he had cropped pictures and edited copy for his high school newspaper the previous year, he raised his hand.

Kigin soon met Kling, who handed him copies of the magazine of classical station WFMT in Chicago and hired him to edit *Preview* magazine, KSJR's first printed program guide. He filled this role for two years, worked as a KSJR control board operator and part-time reporter, and graduated with honors from Saint John's in 1970. Although he then left Collegeville and served three years in the Marines followed by law school, Kigin would return and become enormously influential in the development of Minnesota Public Radio.

Another member of KSJR's early crew was Saint John's grad Arthur Hoehn, the former student AM radio station's classical music director and KSJR's first classical music host with any real radio experience—which he had gained behind the mic in Tijuana, Mexico, at rhythm-and-blues station XERB. There he worked with legendary DJ Wolfman Jack and used the memorable broadcast name Fat Daddy Washington. After stints at several commercial classical music stations, he brought to Collegeville a smooth and melodious voice that in later years proved perfect for late night radio. Hoehn himself joked that his voice could put even *him* to sleep. Ingeniously, Hoehn conquered KSJR's chronic



Cover and opening paragraphs of the first *Preview* Magazine.

static electricity problems, avoiding shocks by tethering himself to any large piece of metal in the studio with a long ground wire attached to his belt buckle. With enough slack in the wire he could move freely. His system looked strange to the studio's visitors, but it was effective.

Gary Eichten, also a student at Saint John's, began at the station on April Fool's Day in 1967. He had grown up in Mankato and in high school had a job at New Ulm polka station KNUJ by fibbing about his (nonexistent) radio experience. Tired of washing pots and pans in the Saint John's refectory and hoping to make a step up from his volunteer work with the student radio

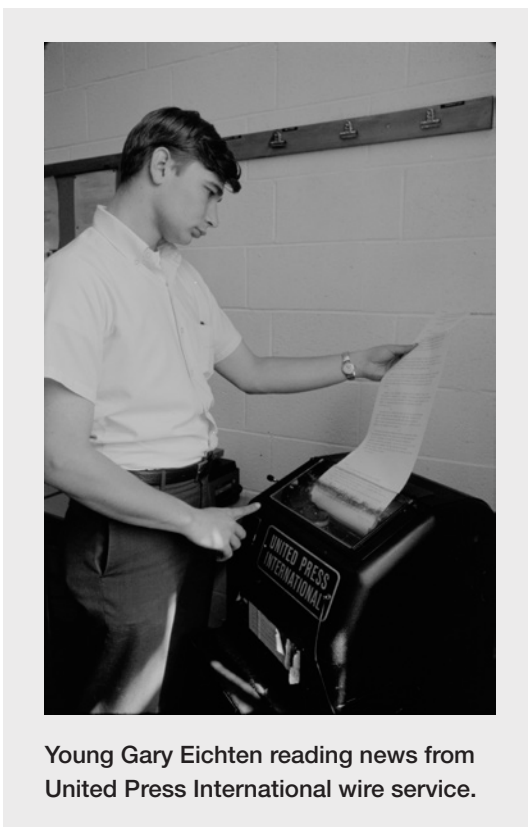
station, Eichten presented himself to KSJR—but he lacked interest in news reporting and knew nothing about classical music. “I was a total dodo,” he says. “I thought, ‘Who in Central Minnesota is ever going to listen to this music and this high-toney news?’” He remembers looking at KSJR’s grand piano and its studio equipment, set up to record chamber music, and thinking the notion of trying to run a successful station out of that facility was impractical.

Nevertheless, Eichten became the station’s one-man news department, and eventually his opinion changed. Eichten worked hard at improving the sound of his voice because at first he thought his news delivery sounded like someone angrily giving a speech. With some experimentation, he discovered that turning the volume in his headphones up to full blast forced him to speak more intimately, which gave him a better radio voice.

Michael Barone arrived at KSJR in 1968 directly from his graduation from the Oberlin Conservatory, where he had studied the organ and worked at the campus radio station. His position: KSJR’s first non-student music



Arthur Hoehn in Collegeville production studio.



Young Gary Eichten reading news from United Press International wire service.



Michael Barone in the record library, 1971.

director, replacing Saint John's student Bob Sachek who left to study abroad. Barone grew up in the northeastern Pennsylvania town of Kingston, the child of a musical family. He has an early memory of sitting in a high balcony of New York's Metropolitan Opera House and thinking that he could fall down into the tuba. At Oberlin, Barone had grown fascinated by the wonderful diversity of classical music. He was uncertain of his future during his final year and wondered if he could find an employer who would pay him to announce music on the radio.

When Kling hired him as music director, Barone was simultaneously offered a position at WCLV-FM, the Cleveland classical music station. The recent student had never heard of Collegeville or KSJR. After brief negotiations with the head of WCLV and Kling, Barone, with a somewhat vague idea of when to report for work, accepted the position in Collegeville. Barone suspected he had made the right choice after he arrived in Collegeville, entered the resonant acoustical space of Saint John's Abbey church, flicked on the Holtkamp organ,

and played a piece. He thought, “OK, this just might be a possibility.”

Eichten remembers seeing Barone for the first time in the KSJR studios: “He was sleeping in his underwear in the music library—he had just driven all the way from Oberlin.” This sleeper, a shaggy intellectual, never intended to spend his life in radio. But he was given almost complete freedom in programming music for broadcast, and the young organist went on to spend the next fifty years with MPR, developing into an internationally respected producer and presenter of classical music and the creator of the acclaimed and venerable organ program *Pipedreams*.

The staff was about to grow more in 1969, when Garrison Keillor, then 26 years old and three years out of the University of Minnesota, drove from Minneapolis to Collegeville to interview for a job as morning host at KSJR. He dressed in what he considered proper attire for a writer: jeans, work boots, and a corduroy jacket with elbow patches. Kling wore a business suit and tie.

Keillor really needed the job. He had been hosting a classical music show at KUOM, the University of Minnesota radio service. KUOM shared a daytime-only AM frequency with Saint Olaf College’s WCAL and aired a hodgepodge of public affairs, news, classical music, and instructional programming. When it became clear that KUOM and Keillor didn’t have a shared vision for his future—other than allowing him long periods of time during classical performances to practice writing—Keillor decided to leave. Having a young family to support, he looked to KSJR for an opportunity.

In his job interview, the only one in his fifty-year career, he showed he had what the station needed: a good voice and the ability to pronounce classical composers’ and performers’ names. With vague ideas of his job, Keillor accepted an offer from KSJR and agreed to host the weekday morning show at 6 a.m. and remain on the air until noon. Nobody at the station suspected that this new hire had creative urges that would lead him to turn a traditional classical music morning program upside down. Keillor rented a poorly insulated and badly



Garrison Keillor, Michael Barone, Arthur Hoehn, Dan Rieder, Gary Eichten, Jim Davis pose for a staff portrait in Collegeville.

heated former farmhouse in Freeport, Minnesota (not far from the mythical setting for Lake Wobegon), and he and his family moved in.

Keillor had drifted into radio on an uncertain career path. He grew up in Anoka in a religious Plymouth Brethren family whose members later gave him rich inspiration for characters. Writing, his main interest, evoked suspicion among his relatives, as did his interest in popular music.

High school English teachers and college professors, including John Berryman and U.S. poet laureate Allen Tate, widened his horizons. Keillor graduated from the University of Minnesota determined to figure out what he had to do to become a writer. He fell into working at its radio station because it allowed him time to do his own writing.

Once at KSJR, Keillor enjoyed the absence of meetings and reveled in his

freedom. “I would never allow anyone to have the freedom I had—nobody, ever.” he says.

“I’m not sure Bill was wise to trust me,” he adds, admitting to confusion in his new job. He wanted to develop into a distinguished writer, and he felt conflicted about the ease with which he settled into his role at KSJR. And the ambitious Keillor definitely did not want to work in a broadcasting backwater.

In Kling, Keillor puzzled over a boss who was both practical and endlessly curious, especially about the potential of radio. Kling struck Keillor as forward-thinking, disciplined, soft-spoken, and diplomatic. “It became a partnership of unlikes, and we each had to recognize that the other person’s dedication could be trusted,” Keillor remembers.

Kling gave Keillor a place where he could use all his talents, which were then largely unseen. The station could have plodded along nicely without Keillor, but it never would have been the same without him.

At the station he had neither a clear idea of what he wanted to do nor any particular ambition in radio. Looking back now, he believes everything that happened later fell into his lap. Because good fortune had granted Keillor a job in which he could exhibit his creative broadcasting talents, that allowed him to begin contributing to *The New Yorker*. In fact, he remembers doing little more than writing during these years. Simultaneously, he created a morning music program that mixed the Beach Boys with Beethoven and included a collection of mythical sponsors who drew out the empathy of listeners. The program also attracted the attention of *Minneapolis Tribune* columnist Will Jones who almost single handedly, in multiple columns, introduced Garrison Keillor to the Twin Cities.

Fending Off Rodents

The station's unconventional staff had successes, mishaps, and close calls. In 1968, gophers repeatedly chewed through the station's underground power lines, forcing KSJR off the air for hours and even days at a time. Only upgrading to metal-shielded cables stopped the subterranean vandalism, which was always fatal to both the rodents and the broadcasts.

During the riotous 1968 presidential campaign, Kling and Eichten drove to Saint Paul to broadcast a live political debate between Eugene McCarthy and Hubert Humphrey, both vying for the Democratic presidential nomination. Lacking a proper broadcast sound mixer, Kling borrowed a music mixer from legendary broadcaster Jack Moore of WAYL. Kling used that device, powered by flashlight batteries, to mix the stage microphone feed with Eichten's microphone feed to send out to KSJR in Collegeville—not something a professional sound engineer would advise doing. With Kling's last-second soldering, the broadcast began. The equipment was exotic enough that ABC television and CBS network engineers came over to see what new technology they were missing. Things became a bit awkward when these professionals noticed that Kling was holding the two feed wires together with his fingers. It was dangerous for Kling. But for the KJSN audience, it was a triumph.

Early Financial Support

The station's financial situation was even more risky. KSJR ended its first year with a deficit of \$47,000. Saint John's University filled the gap.

Two of the station's earliest individual supporters were Sarah-Maud and Bob Sivertsen, who owned a cottage on the shores of Lake Alexander, north of Little Falls, Minnesota. They had come across KSJR's FM signal soon after the station began broadcasting. Both lovers of classical music, especially opera, they mailed in a \$5,000 donation in 1967—the largest gift anyone at KSJR had ever seen, other than the start-up gifts from Dr. Wenner. A note was enclosed: “Gentleman, in appreciation of the great pleasure that your FM classical music programs have brought to me and my husband at our country home, please accept the enclosed check. Keep up the good work.” This gift was just the first of many from the Sivertsens that helped MPR grow over the last 50 years.

Stunned, Kling felt compelled to thank these people in person. In mid-winter he drove to their cottage unannounced, launching the Sivertsens' long friendship with the enterprise that became MPR. Over the years, the Sivertsons also supported a boost to the KSJR signal, a new KSJN antenna, studio booths for the broadcasts of Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra concerts, the organization's first computer, its remodel of the Fitzgerald Theater, and a new headquarters in downtown Saint Paul, including the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Music Studio, the facility's spectacular performance and recording studio, featuring a new Steinway grand piano. Their enthusiasm and support helped create the MPR we know today.

With this kind of individual engagement and encouragement, Kling could



Bob Sivertsen, Sarah-Maud Weyerhaeuser Sivertsen, Father Colman Barry, OSB, and Bill Kling at the dedication ceremony for the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Recording Studio (December 6, 1980).

see past the immediate difficulties to a brighter future. The station satisfied Father Colman's wish to extend Saint John's University into the region, but that wasn't enough for Kling. Steadily coalescing were Kling's aspirations of building a high-quality music and public affairs radio service that could grow into a statewide network. Father Colman, in his role as board chair, supported those aspirations in every way. Already Kling was thinking of turning this small Stearns County radio station into one of the best public broadcasting operations in the world. Kling wanted to lead the best radio organization in America, and he never wavered from that goal.

The Audience Beyond the Horizon

The large metropolitan area of Minneapolis-Saint Paul is 75 miles beyond Collegeville's southeastern horizon. Large numbers of potential donors, listeners, and underwriters lived in the Twin Cities, most of them out of range of KSJR's signal.

Now calling the small broadcast enterprise Minnesota Educational Radio (MER), Kling envisioned an expansion into the Twin Cities as the first step in developing it into a statewide network. He believed the more people MER served, the more successful it would be. This was especially important for a non-profit public broadcasting service that did not yet solicit on-air contributions from its audience; more listeners meant more potential financial donors. Although the *Preview* program guide's mailing list formed the initial MER membership, building sufficient support in a small market was dauntingly difficult.

MER's second station, KSJN-FM, was the initial outreach into the Twin Cities. KSJN-FM began broadcasting in October 1967, a mere nine months after KSJR, as a metro-area booster of the signal from Collegeville. The principle was simple; the execution was not. Installed by Kling because engineer Rieder was afraid of heights, an antenna atop a water tower in the Twin Cities suburb of Columbia Heights picked up the FM signal from KSJR in Collegeville and fed it to a Marantz stereo tuner at the base of the tower. The signal then traveled from the receiver via telephone wires to the KSJN transmitter on a New Brighton radio tower rented from WAYL-FM where it was rebroadcast at a new frequency, 91.1 FM, for Twin Cities listeners.

It worked, but not without problems. The telephone lines connecting the

Columbia Heights receiver with the antenna in New Brighton were mysteriously unreliable. KSJN's radio signal would regularly disappear on Saturdays during the Metropolitan Opera broadcast. After assigning Rieder to sit in the telephone building for the weekend, it turned out that a janitor was unplugging the amplifier that received and re-sent the station's signal when he needed an outlet for the floor polisher. Listeners heard dead air during each weekly round of floor maintenance, usually during the live broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera.

In addition, the receiver on the water tower often picked up interference from other radio signals. Once again, Engineer Dan Rieder had a solution. He asked the Saint John's plumbing shop to build a four-foot-high copper tube "cavity filter" that narrowly focused the receiver on the KSJR signal—a trick he had learned as a Navy electrical engineer.

High winds sometimes left listeners hearing static when loose connections on the WAYL transmission tower created electrical crackles. Moving the transmission site to a much taller tower being constructed for Twin Cities television stations in Shoreview in 1972–73 (with an accompanying boost of the KSJN power to 100,000 watts in 1971), eventually solved that problem and made KSJN a major Twin Cities station.

Talking Books

One innovation that signaled the station's willingness to consider socially significant, entrepreneurial ventures was a concept that Kling said came to him in the shower. He knew KSJR had the technical capability to broadcast a second audio channel on its FM frequency. He considered a variety of educational purposes, including "sleep learning" to help listeners stop smoking. But it seemed only natural to broadcast the reading of current books and magazines to people with low vision or blindness. After trying to raise interest from several advocacy groups, Kling approached Stanley Potter, head of the Minnesota State Services for the Blind in Saint Paul. As a ham radio operator who was visually impaired himself, Potter understood the opportunity immediately.

With several technical hurdles overcome, the world's first Radio Talking Book went on the air using the transmitters of KSJR and KSJN. The service provided audio versions of everything from the morning newspapers to current magazines and books. The first Collegeville newspaper readers included volunteers like Isabelle Durenberger, mother of U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger, and several Saint John's monks, as well as KSJR's Gary Eichten. There was no addition to staff, though. Whoever was running the control board for KSJR's regular broadcasts was also responsible for engineering the taped readings of the volunteers. If a reader didn't show up for taping, board operators had to do the reading themselves, while juggling KSJR's normal broadcast.

With support from the Hamm Foundation and others, the Radio Talking Book concept spread to dozens of states and countries. A decade later, Kling called it the most significant achievement of the young organization's first ten



C Stanley Potter, Colman Barry OSB, and Frank Rarig at a press conference announcing the start of the Radio Talking Book, a service of Minnesota State Services for the Blind that was (and still is) delivered on a subchannel of the MPR signal throughout the State of Minnesota.

years. Radio Talking Book remains active and essential today as a program of the Minnesota State Services for the Blind, and it broadcasts to thousands of subscribers in all corners of Minnesota.

Morning Show on the Prairie

Listeners who tuned into KSJN heard only the boosted signal from Collegeville for several years. Keillor was on-the-air for six hours a day. This included, during the first half of his shift, Keillor's morning program, which he eventually called *A Prairie Home Morning Show*, after the Prairie Home Cemetery he had noticed off the highway in Moorhead, Minnesota.

A Prairie Home Morning Show offered an eclectic assortment of music that first surprised, and then delighted, many listeners expecting all-classical fare. It also dismayed listeners expecting to hear only Bach and Stravinsky. Keillor included Renaissance dance music, pop hits, works by Judy Collins, bluegrass, pieces by Beethoven, and music by others both obscure and wonderful. He invented almost-believable sponsors for the show, including Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery and Jack's Auto Repair, inspired by Jack's Outlet in Keillor's hometown of Anoka. These mythical sponsors grew into fully realized creations in the minds of listeners.

To Keillor, all these pieces seemed to fit together. He wanted to eliminate the solemnity of public radio, especially in the morning—to make an upbeat morning show. And to make people feel good at the beginning of their day.

Public Radio Services Organize

A thousand miles from Minnesota, when MER was in its first year of broadcasting, a system of funding and developing programming for public radio stations was evolving. Kling quickly became an influential part of it.

After many years of lobbying, advocates of educational broadcasting had succeeded in convincing Congress and the President that an enlightened citizenry in this country would advance—educationally, culturally, and in its access to information—with the establishment of an alternative network of broadcasters to complement commercial stations. When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act in the fall of 1967, this landmark piece of federal legislation began to influence much of what Americans heard on the radio and watched on television. The Act created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a financing hub for a burgeoning crop of noncommercial broadcasters like MER.

A few semantic shifts hinted at the resulting future. Increasingly, “public radio” became the identifying term used by stations affiliated with CPB. Gradually, MER began using the name Minnesota Public Radio to signal its link to the new network of stations coalescing around CPB and to show its reliance on funding from educational sponsors, CPB, individual donors, and other non-advertising sources. The name was officially changed to Minnesota Public Radio in 1974.

Shortly after CPB was formed, Kling joined an advisory council of public radio station managers. This group quickly identified a major common hindrance to their work: individual stations could create their own programs, but there



The Founding Board of National Public Radio, gathered in Washington D.C. to sign the documents which incorporated NPR.

Standing (L to R): Joe Gwathmey (San Antonio, TX), Carl Schmidt (Wisconsin Public Radio), David Platt (Tallahassee, FL), Marvin Segelman, Bill Kling (Minnesota Public Radio)
Seated (L to R): Dick Estell (East Lansing, MI), John Macy (President of the CPB), John Witherspoon (San Diego), Berine Mayes (KQED, San Francisco)

was no simple way to distribute them or to pool money to produce high-quality programs of national interest. There was an urgent need for a public radio network that could take on this catalyzing role. The advisory council voted to allot \$1 million of CPB's funds to establish a headquarters for this network in Washington, D.C. "At the time, it seemed like an enormous amount of money," Kling remembers.

That effort gave birth in 1970 to a new entity called National Public Radio (NPR), which originally focused on the national production and distribution activities that Kling and the other station managers had envisioned. Kling was

elected a member of NPR's first board of directors, where he'd serve for the next nine years.

NPR's early board meetings laid bare the range of ability and ambition among public radio stations at the time. "We would argue about the standards you had to meet to be a member of the NPR network, and these discussions would go on for weeks and drive me crazy," Kling says. "I wanted NPR to have a really professional network of stations." Kling and his like-thinking colleagues eventually prevailed, and the network formed from 75 stations, including broadcasters in Boston, Washington DC, Chicago, Indiana, Ohio, California, and many midwestern university stations. It included KSJR and KSJN as well.

As one of the pioneers of the type of broadcasting that was already achieving the goals of the Public Broadcasting Act, Kling wanted to be in the thick of the action. He decided to temporarily leave MER to add his experience and vision to the efforts in Washington to strengthen and organize public radio. Placing his former Saint John's classmate Mike Obler in charge of things at MER, Kling went east in 1972.

While Kling was away, Obler fought to get KSJN on the vastly superior Shoreview tower, a move that Hubbard Broadcasting legally challenged. He also managed the warring factions at Saint John's and in the stations' audiences, calming those who advocated firing Garrison Keillor and those who loved his work.

During Kling's time working for CPB, first in New York and then in Washington, he helped shape CPB's funding policies and guide the fledgling NPR and its network as it prepared for the landmark programs and activities that were to come. NPR's mission statement laid out a purpose commercial radio executives likely considered bewildering, if not alarming: "National Public Radio will serve the individual; it will promote personal growth; it will regard the individual differences among men with respect and joy rather than derision and hate; it will celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied

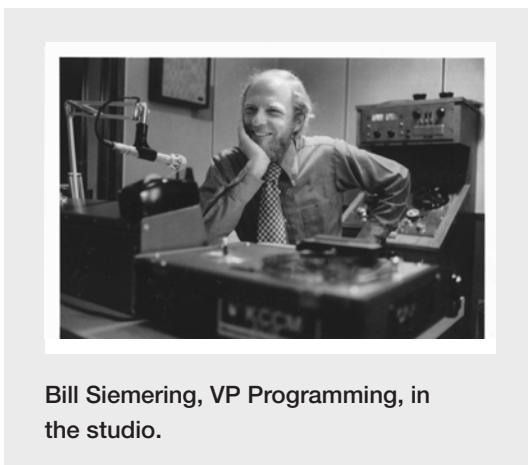
rather than vacuous and banal; it will encourage a sense of active constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness.” Since then, this language has changed, but not its original ambition.

The author of that astounding mission statement was Bill Siemering, NPR’s first Program Director. By 1971, Siemering had hired a small but dedicated staff that was producing national feeds of live broadcasts of hearings from the U.S. Senate on the Vietnam War and other programs that gave listeners of NPR member stations a seat inside the halls of Congress.

That same year marked the debut of NPR’s weekday news magazine program, *All Things Considered*, Siemering characterized the program as “talk[ing] to our listeners just the same way we talk to our friends.” *All Things Considered* strongly influenced the delivery of news on public radio for years to come and earned a Peabody Award for excellence in broadcasting in short order.

After a year away from MER, Kling returned to Minnesota with an understanding of how CPB funding could help public radio stations expand. He saw a future in which MER would have a vibrant news operation, become a high-quality noncommercial cultural resource for Minnesotans, and produce programming for a national audience of listeners. Kling was convinced it was a worthwhile and achievable goal.

Although Bill Kling and Father Colman may have once believed that a single high-powered station in Collegeville could blanket the state with programming—Kling now knew that it wasn’t enough. Beyond KSJN in the Twin Cities, Kling envisioned a powerful collection of separate broadcast locations, all under one umbrella. It would require a thorough scattering of MER stations in many parts



Bill Siemering, VP Programming, in the studio.

of the state to become this vital and influential statewide radio entity.

After returning to MER to “implement the policies that CPB had developed,” new NPR board member Kling championed another young broadcasting organization: The Association of Public Radio Stations. Its purpose was to advance the interests of public radio stations in Congressional debates about funding, and to represent the financial and programming needs of stations to NPR and CPB. Although the association had great success as a lobbying organization, it eventually merged its resources and board with NPR, a move Kling considered a major mistake for mixing politics and programming in a single organization.

A Drive for Members

Kling knew that his plans for a statewide organization would never become reality if MER continued to depend only on support from Saint John's University and occasional gifts from foundations and individuals. Funding was short, and growth seemed impossible. That left Saint John's with two options: pare the stations down to an affordable, small endeavor that would entertain listeners but probably not make a big difference in their lives, OR give KSJR and KSJN to a new non-profit organization that could raise money and run with the stations' bold goals.

In 1970 Father Colman and Saint John's decided to follow the second course, which made it possible for MER to grow or fail on its own merits, without the constraints of a parent institution carrying the full burden of its operating costs. This divestment of two valuable broadcast licenses was a visionary and selfless act that may rank among Saint John's proudest moments. It also resolved a growing conflict inside the Abbey, where some referred to MER as "Colman's folly" as its deficit rose.

All of this led to the organization's first formal on-air membership drive in 1973, held with high hopes and just four open phone lines. The service had already introduced listeners to the concept of becoming donors—to make contributions to support a year of the programming they liked—with appeals from hosts and often Bill Kling giving out the phone number and requesting contributions in the form of mailed-in checks.

To support the growth MER anticipated in the years ahead, it needed more money and the commitment of people in the community who would contribute



Sally Pope in the studio at Park Square Court. (April 1975)

regularly, and not just because they happened to be tuned in when the calls for donations were aired. Sally Pope, an early MER volunteer, took her role very seriously and brought focus and organization to the new membership approach.

Several years earlier, Pope had participated in organizing fundraising on-air auctions for public television station KTCA in Saint Paul and served on its volunteer board. Hearing of the start of KSJN's operations, the public TV advisory board decided to send out feelers to the new radio network in the hope of better understanding its strategy. Pope, the only one on the board who had ever listened to KSJN, got the task.

But before she could act, Pope received a letter from Kling who had heard about the new "radio committee" at KTCA and offered his assistance. They agreed to meet at the Saint Paul radio studios. "I expected to see a very seasoned

older person, and this child came out of the office and said he was Bill Kling,” she remembers. Her opinion changed when, on the spot, Kling gave her an impromptu master class in public broadcasting administration, regulation, and program production. Grateful for the time and information he gave, Pope offered to pay him back by taking on a limited volunteer project for MER. A project that changed her life and the radio station.

Kling asked her to promote and publicize MER’s new upcoming series of broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera. Pope accepted and she sent a mailing to potential listeners and donors using a borrowed list of past ticket buyers to Metropolitan Opera tour concerts in the Twin Cities. The mailing was successful. “I became entranced with the way the offices and studios felt, and with the way people there worked together,” she says. Soon she was volunteering on nearly a full-time basis.

Kling wasted no time in giving her responsibility for planning what quickly became an iconic event, MER’s on-air membership drive, something that Pope suspects was among the first such drives in public radio history. She had only ten days to plan that first on-air drive in 1973.

“At that point, the concept of public radio was not well understood,” Pope recalls. “We were trying to get listeners to become contributing members. Part of what we needed to do was to explain the difference between commercial stations and this relatively new publicly supported one. And we also hoped to describe KSJN as an important part of our shared community.”

Determined and organized, Pope began by calling influential people to let them know about the upcoming drive. She also asked many of them to come into the studio and go on the air to tell their stories about why MER was important to them and what it added to the community. Pope was persuasive, and she represented a station that filled a definite need in the Twin Cities. Mayors, CEOs, musicians—none refused her invitation.

Pope then had another idea: give thank-you gifts to donating members.

She reeled in restaurant and book coupons, obtained packages of wild rice and calendars, and contacted leaders of corporations and foundations requesting that they offer money that would match listeners' donations.

Matching was a new and promising idea, and enabled listeners to give more than they were actually donating themselves. "I didn't quite know how it would go, but it seemed to me worth a try," Pope says.

Horner Waldorf Corporation CEO John Myers became the first to agree to offer a matching gift. The match was scheduled for a three-hour block of time on the second night of the drive. Myers asked how much Pope thought the match might amount to. With no experience with this strategy, Pope offered her best guess: about \$2,000.

To her astonishment, listener pledges for Myers' matching hours soared to about \$8,000—a welcome, but embarrassingly high amount. Later that week, she met with Myers to apologize and offer to limit his match to her earlier quoted amount. Myers smiled and said he would allow no such thing. With the matched funds, the weeklong drive earned \$40,000—double the initial goal.

Volunteers staffing the phone lines were a crucial part of every drive. All kinds of people staffed the phones: Young and old, students and professionals, people who listened to MER at home, in cars, and at work—the volunteers were a cross-section of listeners. Volunteers and phones filled a second-floor hallway of the Park Square Court building, MER's base in downtown Saint Paul. "It became really noisy because the phones were ringing, and everybody was on the phones," Pope says. "It was a little bit like a safe shipwreck atmosphere—everybody made friends down the phone lines." Pizza disappeared and a powerful new tradition took off.

Pope soon brought her expertise to MER permanently. She served in a variety of capacities: as the first woman to be a member of the board, and then, resigning that position, joined the staff in early 1974 as director of community relations and, later, became Vice President of Community Relations. Her

curiosity and unconventional thinking were consistent with Kling's views around engaging listeners and volunteers in new ways. Bill Kling and Sally Pope married in 1976 and she remained with the organization until 1988.

The Newsroom Comes into Its Own

As on-air fundraising was growing, KSJN began creating original programming for the young MER network. In 1972, MER's news department moved to Saint Paul, the state's capital, to be closer to influential people and events. A small group of reporters had offices in downtown Saint Paul, first in the basement of the Saint Paul Arts and Science Center (more recently McNally-Smith College of Music) and then in a cramped, but impressively designed studio space in the Park Square Court building in the Lowertown district. The news staff was still small, but now they were in a location that enabled them to report news faster and more completely than they could from Collegeville.

Benefiting from Kling's knowledge of CPB, MER had successfully applied for a four-year grant to improve up the news operation. With additional support from the Bush Foundation, the Northwest Area Foundation, and the Charles Weyerhaeuser Foundation, the CPB grant allowed MER to hire Dick Daly, a former commercial broadcaster from Duluth, as MER's news director in 1973. Daly hired new reporters who believed in rigorous journalism and brought professional expertise to the staff, and their work attracted listeners by providing news that had depth and substance. "We wanted to give the listener the feeling that they shouldn't regard us only as a source for alternative news—they should regard us as a mainstream news source," Daly says.

MER's news reporters often covered local stories commercial media didn't. Reporter Greg Barron, lured from California by the promise of water skiing, joined MER in 1973 and produced stories on campaign finance reform in Minnesota, the lives of recently arrived Mexican-Americans in the state, the



Dennis Hamilton, Dick Daly, Jon McTaggart, and a contract engineer at Black Duck transmitter site.

difficulties women experienced in buying insurance, and the struggles of refugees during and after the Vietnam War, among many stories in his first few years on the staff. He went on to win two Peabody Awards for his reporting at MER. To give time to news of particular regional interest, Daly embedded the station's feed of *All Things Considered* (ATC) with KSJN-generated content and enlarged the full program from 90 minutes to two hours by inserting 30 minutes of KSJN content in 10 minute segments. Using the available analog equipment, MER engineers taped ATC's live national feed while the local segments were on the air in order to delay it. Kling recalls that the tapes were spooled into a wastebasket, then played back through the tape player out of the wastebasket as a "delay" for broadcast. This manual approach allowed MER to be the first broadcaster to integrate local and national news on ATC.

Initially, NPR didn't approve of this augmentation of the program, but it eventually became the model for today's program that is designed to include multiple blocks of local coverage inserted into the national NPR news programs.



In addition to his role as a local news reporter and producer, Greg Barron created long form radio documentaries. In 1979, he Barron traveled to Thailand with a group of Minnesota doctors and nurses to tell the story of Cambodian refugees fleeing the Khmer Rouge genocide. Barron's other works include the Peabody award winning documentaries *The Way to 8-A* and *The Prairie was Quiet*.

MER set the standard that is still the format for today's ATC broadcasts.

MER's pioneering regional edition of ATC forced its reporters to gather 30 minutes of local reporting daily. Each day they went out with the mission to be comprehensive and in-depth in their coverage. That detailed reporting, along with investigations and documentaries, distinguished MER's approach to news from that of the commercial stations.

Reporters set out to inform and educate their listeners. MER covered the

1973 occupation of Wounded Knee by American Indian Movement activists and the 1977 trial four years later in Fargo of Leonard Peltier for shooting two FBI agents. MER reporters examined proposals for copper and nickel mining in northern Minnesota, the controversy over Reserve Mining's dumping of taconite tailings into Lake Superior, and the long-running dispute over the construction of high-voltage electric power lines over the property of Minnesota farmers.

The CPB grant, now expanded from four years to five years, also allowed Daly to hire veteran news reporter Bob Potter. Potter began his broadcasting career at KUOM, the University of Minnesota's classical music and public affairs station, then worked as a news writer for the market-leading local CBS affiliate WCCO television, before returning to KUOM. When there was turnover in MER's state capitol bureau, Potter stepped in to report on state government and the legislative session, even though he lacked deep journalistic credentials.

"All I needed to have was some interest and a modicum of ability," Potter remembers. "I ended up having a fabulous opportunity to do a variety of interesting and challenging things. I was learning as I went along."

Potter played a role in some of MER's earliest public affairs programming. Starting in 1972, he hosted a midday show that featured recorded talks from National Press Club lunches, Chicago's Studs Terkel interviews, Commonwealth Club lectures, and other programs on topics of national interest and importance. Taped programs were sent by independent producers and arrived by U.S. mail, the standard early distribution method for national shows. Later, telephone lines spread programs intended for a "network" of stations.

Around this time, Potter also took part in early call-in programs which directly engaged audiences. This was a new approach to doing a program, and Potter felt nervous about what obscenities or other FCC-banned language callers might utter. "We finally decided we'd just keep our fingers crossed, and we never really got burned on it," Potter says. "The main thing was to get callers to get to the guts of what they wanted to ask."

One of the first guests for these call-ins was Minnesota U.S. Senator Hubert Humphrey.

Through MER's NPR feed, listeners had access to the Vietnam War hearings of the Fulbright Committee and Supreme Court coverage, among other news specials—events no other media offered in live coverage at that time. The KSJN studios in Park Square Court pulsed with activity, its young staff dedicated to bringing listeners memorable news reporting. The new Twin Cities station was establishing its own identity and delivering the issues in a new way; providing listeners with in-depth news coverage and stories of critical importance.

As new reporting grew stronger, a creative tension arose between the news and music departments over how best to allocate limited air time. KSJR and KSJN remained primarily classical music stations, supplemented by local and special news coverage.

“We were at that time mainly classical music stations with some news. But through NPR, we offered a lot of special coverage of things of national interest like the Watergate hearings,” Daly remembers. “I wanted to take the music off and put these hearings on. We went at it hammer and tong.” Often Kling had to arbitrate between these competing interests, and in the case of the Watergate hearings, Daly won.



Greg Barron interviews attorney William F. Messinger for his radio documentary *The Way to 8-A*, a sound portrait of Hennepin County General Hospital's psychiatric ward with a focus on involuntary commitment. Throughout the documentary, Messinger offers clarification on the nuanced legality of involuntary commitment to psychiatric care. Interviews and narration are interspersed with ambient sounds of the ward. The documentary was well received, winning a number of awards in 1979, including a George Foster Peabody Broadcasting Award, United Press International-Minnesota Broadcasters Organization Radio and Television outstanding achievement award, Northwest Broadcast News Association award for broadcasting excellence, Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, 1980 Minnesota Page One Award, and the Ohio State Award. Barron and engineer David Felland were instrumental in reviving the long form radio documentary.

One Crisis, Two Rescuers

By the early 1970s, the MER Board included prominent civic-minded leaders of major Minnesota organizations, such as George Benz, chairman of the board of the American National Bank; Lewis Paper, chair of the board of Paper Calmenson Steel Corporation; Earl Ewald, chair of the board of Northern States Power Company; Larry Haeg Sr., general manager of WCCO Radio; Bower Hawthorne, editor of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*; Dean Myhr, head of the Minnesota State Arts Board; Stephen Pflaum, a Minneapolis attorney; and Paul Thorson, vice-president of Concordia College in Moorhead.

The board met its first crisis in 1971. MER's business manager Lynda Nordang had left a note on Kling's door that said, "We've run out of cash and won't make payroll this month." The bookkeeping department was moving from Collegeville to Saint Paul, and during that lengthy move, the ledgers had not been balanced. Support from listeners and institutional sponsors was not yet sufficient to finance MER's ambitious programs and plans, but no one realized that.

Deeply alarmed, Kling was sick at the side of a highway as he contemplated the consequences of the money shortage, then remembered there was a banker on the board: George Benz, Sr. A short-term \$5,000 loan from his institution saved the day, and American National Bank became the organization's bank for decades.

Board members then examined the finances for the next fiscal year. They determined MER needed \$25,000, and fast, to address the cash shortage and balance the budget. Once again, Sarah-Maud and Bob Sivertsen stepped up

with a cash gift to help MER.

Looking to avoid anything like this happening again, Kling sought more people with solid business experience to serve on the Board. Few of the new board members knew the radio business well, but they loved what they heard on public radio and wanted to help build an organization that would contribute to the community. In the years that followed, the MER board would include such strong community and business leaders as Thomas McBurney, president of Pillsbury's US Division; Steve Rothschild, a top executive with General Mills;

Nicky Carpenter, a leader on many boards of non-profit organizations around the region; Susan Boren of Dayton Hudson; Glen Nelson, a vice chair at Medtronic; John Rollwagen, CEO of Cray Research and Randy Hogan, the CEO of Pentair. Many of these people possessed the rare ability to examine issues and find solutions that benefited the community and aligned with the mission, even when Kling was set on another solution. That was part of the reason they had been chosen.

“The board was always encouraged to think with us,” Kling remembers. “A strong board always does that, and when there’s a problem they are a part of the solution because they understand the issue. Our board asked questions that made us rethink positions. A big part of their job was to *make* us rethink our positions.”



Nicky Carpenter and Eric Friesen with a BBC representative during the BBC Weekend in June 1991.

Live Concerts in Living Rooms

In 1971, Elmer L. Andersen, former Minnesota governor and then board chairman of The H.B. Fuller Company, called Kling on an icy night in Washington D.C., where Kling was meeting with CPB executives and was stranded without transportation. Andersen's news: Fuller would be honored to underwrite a season of live performances of the Minnesota Orchestra for national distribution on the fledgling NPR network, from its new Orchestra Hall. It was a rare offer from a rare individual.

Even though the funding for the new undertaking was securely in place, the broadcast equipment and studio, made possible by a generous gift from Sarah-Maud and Bob Sivertsen, was not fully installed in Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis when opening night arrived.

About 30 seconds before the first concert's broadcast time, the "deadline fearless" engineer D. Michael Shields, completed the installation of the equipment. MER's host welcomed the national audience; the broadcast had begun as promised. The announcer continued, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, our national anthem." But what followed was Richard Wagner's overture to *The Flying Dutchman*. "It was a moment of supreme embarrassment," the host later confessed.

That initial rough patch over, things went nearly flawlessly during the inaugural season of live national Minnesota Orchestra broadcasts, and it laid down a strong foundation for the future. Being able to deliver those concerts to listeners near and far was an enormous step in creating a large audience and setting a high bar for the level of cultural events MER would provide to

listeners who might never have the opportunity to be in the concert hall.

Soon after, MER also began regularly broadcasting recorded and live concerts by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO), an ensemble that the charismatic Dennis Russell Davies began conducting in 1971. For MER's listeners, these programs offered the best seat in the house before an orchestra renowned for its support of contemporary music, as well as other parts of the vast chamber-orchestra repertoire. MER's broadcasts of both SPCO and Minnesota Orchestra programs quickly went national via the NPR telephone wire network. For SPCO, those broadcasts provided a boost to the group's artistic reputation, helped make SPCO a household name, and made it easier to capture better recording contracts and bookings with guest artists of high stature.

Over time, close relationships developed as well with five regional symphony orchestras in Fargo-Moorhead, Sioux Falls, Saint Cloud, Rochester, and Duluth-Superior. "We've had long-standing and wonderful partnerships with those orchestras," says Brian Newhouse, managing director of classical programming. The organization also supported chamber-sized regional ensembles in broadcasts through the *Artists in Concert*, *Music in the Park*, and *Lund's Presents* programs.

Continuing today, a significant part of the classical programming budget is devoted to recording and airing live performances by world-class orchestras, symphonies and ensembles from the region—and across the world. This collaboration has raised the reputations of both MPR and its partners.

Images of Jazz

But classical music was not the sole musical interest of MER's listeners. In the earliest days of KSJR in Collegeville, a former Saint John's student and student radio station manager named Mike Obler hosted a late-night, all-night weekend jazz show called *FM in the AM*. Jazz heritage had always been a part of the MPR essence.

In keeping with that tradition, MPR hired jazz legend Leigh Kamman, who started his long radio career as a jazz broadcaster in 1940 on the Twin Cities' station WMIN 1400 AM, while he was still in high school. From there Kamman moved to radio stations in Duluth and Denver, Colorado, before landing at WOV in New York City. There he interviewed such jazz legends as Count Basie, Sarah Vaughan, and Duke Ellington. Back in Minnesota in 1956, he worked at KSTP and KQRS, before joining MER in the early 1970's and beginning a program called *The Jazz Image*, first on Friday and later on Saturday nights.

To hear Kamman's theme songs, "Manoir de Mes Reves" in a rare recording of singer Alice Babs with Duke Ellington, as well as other jazz favorites that Kamman used as theme songs, meant something special was ahead. Over the years, Kamman interviewed hundreds of jazz artists on the program. Eddie Berger, Max Roach, Dorothy Donegan, Bobby Watson and others told him of their rough roads, artistic obstacles, and biggest moments. Kamman grew highly respected in the jazz world; seemingly everyone knew him.

Broadcast engineer Randy Johnson worked the board on Kamman's program many times over the years. "He was always very calm," he remembers. "One time I must have played the wrong track on an album. Maybe I was tired. All he

said on the air was, ‘We’ve got bonus material here.’ Nothing would faze him.” Drummer Kenny Horst, longtime owner of the Artists Quarter jazz venue in Minneapolis/Saint Paul, recalls listening to Kamman’s program while he was driving and feeling so transported that he rear-ended the car ahead of him.

For generations of music lovers across the country Kamman’s voice provided an education and inspired a love of jazz music that endured for 60 years. After 34 years on the air on MPR, the last broadcast of Leigh Kamman’s iconic weekly program *The Jazz Image* came on a September night in 2007. Around the region, listeners were driving on dark highways, settling into sleep in their homes, working late night shifts, or going out for an evening under pulsing lights. As he had for decades, Kamman eased them along on a musical journey, into a soundscape of shifting moods. With calm passion he shaped imagery and spoke over complex chords and soaring vocal lines to transport the audience to a place where jazz is illuminated and the lives of the people who make it are revealed. His patter took flight—an original form of slam poetry.

Many of MPR’s hosts in classical music and on *The Current* wanted to be like Leigh Kamman—somebody who knew an awful lot, who was a great broadcaster and the kindest of souls. An on-air host with a unique mixture of professional chops and great decency. Kamman died in 2014, seven years after his last show at age 92.



Dr. Billy Taylor performed a special concert at St. Paul's Bandana Square in a show presented as a tribute to radio broadcaster Leigh Kamman who was celebrating his 50th anniversary in jazz and his 20th anniversary as the host of THE JAZZ IMAGE on Minnesota Public Radio.

Lake Wobegon, Established 1974

Early in its history, MER launched the music and entertainment program that many consider to be the most successful in the history of American public broadcasting. *A Prairie Home Companion (APHC)* built up an audience of nearly 5 million listeners and was carried by some 700 stations around the world. Its first trial run, however, was spotty in quality and nearly a bust.

The show had germinated years earlier, when early KSJN host Garrison Keillor began telling whimsical stories about small town life in fictional Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, punctuated by humorous faux advertising, on his weekday *Prairie Home Morning Show*. This was how listeners first heard of such whimsical sponsors as Bertha's Kitty Boutique (purveyors of Tuna Massage Oil) and Jack's Auto Repair ("All Roads Lead to Jack's").

Sometime later, Keillor, now working from MER's Park Square Court studios, asked to chat with Kling. "I wrote this piece for *The New Yorker* about the Grand Ole Opry." He was intrigued by the interaction and sociability of the Nashville musicians. "I'd like to do a show like that on the air," Keillor told Kling.

Kling wasn't sure what to think, but he gave the OK to an trial run to be performed live at 6:00 a.m. from the KSJN studios. Kling was unimpressed by the cowboy who sang "Old Shep" and the "glass harmonica" player Keillor had booked for *Prairie Home Morning Show's* first effort at a live broadcast performance.

Keillor asked Kling to approve another try. After their usual ping pong style of debate, they agreed to do a Saturday afternoon broadcast from an auditorium at the Saint Paul Arts and Science Center when listeners might be more amenable to wine glasses singing (or "squealing," as Kling describes it).

Now named *A Prairie Home Companion*, the show was first broadcast on July 6, 1974. Admission for the live broadcast performance was a dollar for adults, and 50 cents for kids. Just twelve people were in the seats at the Janet Wallace Auditorium at Macalester College in Saint Paul when the program began, and some of them left at intermission. The musical guests far outnumbered the audience, and included Bill Hinckley, Judy Larson, Vern Sutton, Philip Brunelle, Bob DeHaven, Ernie Garven, the Brescian String Quartet, Cal Hand, and Rudy Darling.

Keillor was 32 years old at the time of that first live broadcast of *APHC*. In retrospect, he sees his first attempt at being an emcee as amateurish and agonizing. Sutton recalled nothing seemed planned and little was rehearsed. Last minute editing remained a Keillor hallmark throughout his career. Sue Scott recalls Keillor many times reaching over shoulders during a performance to edit the script.

But with each performance Keillor got better, and he grew fearless in trying new things and continually improving the show. For one Thanksgiving show early in the program's run, Keillor distributed slips of paper and asked the audience to write down what they were thankful for. Musicians Sutton, Brunelle, and Janis Hardy took the baskets of slips and wrote a Thanksgiving cantata that was then performed in the show's final half hour. Keillor much appreciated the art of extemporizing and those collaborators who could join him in those moments.

With this kind of spontaneity and risk taking, *APHC* acquired the feel and pacing that would distinguish it for decades. After the first live broadcasts at Macalester College, *APHC* wandered to many other Twin Cities venues, including the Walker Art Center, Walker Church, the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, the College of Saint Thomas and even outdoors in the sculpture garden of the St. Paul Arts and Science Center. During the show's first year, there were also broadcast performances in Fargo and Moorhead.



Garrison Keillor

“I just went out and did it,” Keillor says. “That’s all.” In truth, in those early days Keillor spent long hours planning and writing out the *APHC* shows on an Underwood typewriter.

Keillor was concerned about the audience’s experience at the show: whether they were comfortable, had the sun in their eyes, could see and hear well, and so on. “And what does he do at the end of every show? He doesn’t stand back waiting for people to come to him,” says Kate Gustafson, longtime managing director of *APHC*. “He goes out to them and he stays until they’re gone. It’s always about the fan experience, on the radio and in the theater.”

Performers like Dakota Dave Hull, Mark Vinz, Robin and Linda Williams, and Sean Blackburn were regularly appearing on the show. Keillor invited the weekly guest performers to appear through a simple process that avoided the involvement of lawyers and record labels. Gustafson recalls that Keillor would tell the staff he was interested in having a particular performer on the program, and the staff would reach out directly. Ninety percent of the time the performer would anticipate fun and would agree, and then their managers would have their say. “Why would you want to do that?” they’d ask the performer. The answer, according to Gustafson, was invariably, “Because they wanted to.”

Keillor loved collaborating with the musicians and other performers, and he felt a thrill in attempting some song or act that might come off, or might not. Performers expecting one thing and finding another considered him a master of surprise. Musician Peter Ostroushko remembers moments of sheer panic followed by amazement when everything magically went right.

Butch Thompson, the show’s initial pianist and bandleader, felt inexperienced and unprepared during those early shows. Yet, he loved the sociability of the program, the camaraderie, the shared connections and enthusiasm of everyone involved. All that made performers and audiences come back.

In addition to talented guests and regular performers, *APHC* benefited from skilled off-air leaders. Margaret Moos began working in the Collegeville offices around 1970. Rising from the role of staff secretary in Collegeville, she became one of the MER network’s first directors of promotions and public relations, and then the first producer for *A Prairie Home Companion*, helping Garrison Keillor guide the show through its formative years. Christine Tschita later took over this producer role until she left MPR for an opportunity to work in New York City’s vibrant dance and theater communities. Later, Kate Gustafson, managing director of *APHC*, played a key role in the program’s continuing success.

Bolstered by considerable technical and administrative support, the show

grew into the perfect platform for Keillor’s imagination and entertainment instincts. As the show matured, the writing became more playful. Around 1976, *APHC* began doing sketch comedy using the musicians as actors. The following year, in a non-broadcast benefit concert for the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the show featured the orchestra playing the “‘Help Me Rhonda’ Suite.”

By 1979, *APHC* was broadcasting 44 live shows each year. Fifty thousand people attended these shows, including two full houses at the University of Minnesota’s cavernous Northrop Auditorium, 5,000 at Minnehaha Park in Minneapolis, and a substantial, but unrecorded number, at an *APHC* autoharp workshop.

Without intending it, Keillor greatly influenced how Minnesotans see themselves and how the rest of the nation viewed Minnesotans. *APHC* helped cast the region as a place where kind, sensible, funny, and talented people live.

At the same time, also without knowing it, Keillor set in motion a revolution in how public radio programs would be funded and distributed in the future. MER was soon to become an early beneficiary of that change.

New Name, Renewed Mission

From 1969 to 1974, Minnesotans—and a growing number of public radio supporters nationwide—knew this ambitious upstart broadcaster as Minnesota Educational Radio (MER). During those years, MER informally began using the name Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) to describe its network on air and in print.

Kling had come to believe that the “educational” part of the official name gave people the wrong impression. Some potential listeners assumed that MER was simply a vehicle for teaching classes over the radio. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting already used the term “public radio,” and National Public Radio, in existence for five years, had made the phrase commonplace. As a bonus, “public radio” communicated the importance of the support of listeners, not tax appropriations, to drive the service ahead.

In September 1974, with several stations already operating in communities around the state, MER’s board formally approved changing the name to Minnesota Public Radio. The network had the size, mission, and influence to wear the name well. The organization “is already the dominant educational radio entity in the State, and soon it will serve an overwhelming percentage of the State’s geographic area as well as perhaps 90 percent of the population,” a Bush Foundation report noted the previous year. “It is Minnesota’s statewide educational radio system.” The change became official on January 1, 1975.

The timing of the change was fortuitous. MPR was ratcheting up its ambitions just as Twin Cities area companies and foundations were becoming interested in investing to help make the state a mecca for culture and the arts. When Kling



Staff in Collegeville, including Rich Dietman, Sally Pope, Linda Murray, Marylin Heltzer, and Bill Kling.

approached the Northwest Area Foundation about funding the start of a MPR station in Worthington, for instance, foundation CEO John Taylor arranged to triple Kling's request, knowing Kling would be coming back to apply for funds for station start-ups in Rochester and Duluth as well. Taylor suggested it would be faster to just get it all done in one grant. That moved the development of the network up by several years.

By the end of the 1970s, MPR operated a statewide network of six stations with close to 100 employees. MPR's signal was available, at least on higher quality radio receivers, to 95 percent of the people in the state, plus many in

surrounding states.

A group of regional institutions of higher learning, including Concordia College, Luther College, the College of Saint Scholastica, Gustavus Adolphus College, Worthington Community College, Southwest State University, Bemidji State University, and, of course, founder Saint John's University and its sister institution, the College of Saint Benedict, had or eventually would provide early sponsorship and credibility.

Simultaneously, MPR's reputation for news coverage was also growing. Bill Siemering, formerly NPR's Director of Programs, was hired as the manager at MPR station KCCM in Fargo-Moorhead. He called it the best job offer he'd ever gotten. "Bill just told me to sit back and think." Siemering did and he discovered and hired a half dozen of public radio's greatest reporters and program hosts.

MPR's 1970s growth spurt didn't happen smoothly. One challenge came from the University of Minnesota, the state's largest educational institution, which operated Twin Cities station KUOM-AM, the first career stop of Garrison Keillor, Bob Potter. The University believed it should play the lead role in any statewide public radio network.

To resolve this concern, in 1975 Minnesota Governor Wendell Anderson set up a commission to make recommendations for the future of public and educational radio in the state. After much deliberation, the commission supported the growth of a public but non-governmental organization that would offer high-quality local and network-provided programming over two



Carl Erickson, president of Datyon's and a director of the Dayton Hudson Foundation, presents a \$61,455 two-year grant to Bill Kling as William H. Siemering, Vice-President for Programming, looks on. The two-year grant established the position of Vice-President for Programming for MPR.

channels across the state, funded by a variety of institutions and individuals.

To Kling and the MPR board, this sounded a lot like MPR. They felt encouraged to proceed with their plans for a Minnesota noncommercial radio network. But talks about consolidation between MPR and the University ended by mutual agreement even before the publication of the commission's report, which didn't recommend the addition of the University's KUOM in the network. In retrospect, the addition of a part-time, daytime-only AM radio station would not have added significantly to the concept of a full-time dual-channel FM network.

Another set of challenges occurred in the technology realm. In the early years, MPR engineers, including Dan Rieder, Mike Shields, and Ralph Hornberger, made things work and sweated when things went wrong.

Creative solutions were the norm, such as when Kling once arbitrarily poked a finger into a faulty receiver to get it to pick up the Collegeville signal in New Brighton to bring KSJN back on the air. It worked. Engineers skied into the wilderness to repair generators in remote equipment shacks, and drove around in convertibles with large antennae protruding to find spots in the countryside that could serve as radio signal relay points. At other times, ice storms took down antenna towers, and glue-loving porcupines consumed the walls of MPR's relay huts—twice—on Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the dead of winter and again in the White Earth State Forest near Bemidji.

Funding helped overcome many of the early technical obstacles. By the end of MPR's first dozen years, it had found its identity, settled upon its mission, and arrived at its voice. With the help of talented technicians who wouldn't let weather or varmints stop them, that voice filled the air.

Essay by

Kerri Miller

Host, MPR News

Just five days after Minnesota Public Radio went on the air in 1967, three Apollo 1 astronauts—two experienced, one a rookie—died on the launchpad at Cape Canaveral. Americans wondered if the quest for the moon would end before it really began.

Air and ground operations were accelerating in Vietnam, where 380,000 American troops were deployed.

In the summer of '67, violence erupted in Minneapolis after 19 year old Martin Chambers, Black and unarmed, was shot and killed in Tampa, Florida.

Months later, the Kerner report would find that “some 75% of the police departments in the country showed evidence of strong racist attitudes.” The language is startlingly similar to what we’ve heard from city and state leaders as we still grapple, 50 years later, with what characterizes responsible policing.

By the fall of '67, the A2 strain of influenza was spreading so quickly that some east coast schools had to close and mortality rates were spiking among older Americans. It was just a preview, of course, of the deadly Hong Kong flu epidemic that would kill a million people worldwide one year later.

I imagine that that first year and the tumultuous years that

followed tested the resolve and resilience of MPR's founders and first employees.

But I like to imagine that it also sharpened the clarity of the mission of MPR, a mission that must be nimble and flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of our audience even as the essence of that mission remains firmly rooted in service.

I moved to the Twin Cities 30 years ago for a job in television news. I'd been an avid listener of a public radio station in a mid-sized, Midwestern city that was under-funded and under-appreciated. My guess is that it still is.

I discovered MPR just days after I arrived and thought, "Now this is what public radio can be." Committed, consequential, community-focused.

Together, we—our listeners and members—have built a beacon of reason, illumination and world class journalism.

We've endured.

Kerri Miller is a popular talk-show host on MPR News and represents MPR's long-term commitment to including the entire state in discussing vital issues. Kerri also hosts MPR's Talking Volumes series and invites listeners to share her passion for books and authors.

CHAPTER 2



Finding a Voice

By the late 1970s, the story of Minnesota Public Radio was being told around the state of Minnesota.

New funding from members, foundations, and corporations allowed MPR stations to dot the state. It had built the Park Square studios in Downtown Saint Paul, enabled the hiring of a highly capable staff, attracted a hardworking and influential board, and produced a growing audience that kept it all going. Most important of all, MPR was propelled by a clear vision: becoming a cultural force in the region by broadcasting distinctive creative expression and informational programming to a wide area.

However, having only a single station in each community it served limited MPR from achieving this vision; MPR was uncomfortably confined by the growing expectations of its audience. Some listeners tuned in mainly to hear classical music, others for news and public affairs programming, and many in the audience weren't sure what to expect at any particular time of day. Some community stations had dual identities—or more—forcing them to juggle simultaneous devotions to music and to news and information. How should MPR divide its broadcast time between each type of programming? Leadership and programmers wrestled with this fundamental question daily.

During the next decade, MPR went through a creative explosion, a time

when it answered crucial questions about serving its audiences and reached a new height of inventiveness and influence.

A Station for News

By the late 1970s, early KSJN volunteer and employee Tom Kigin was back at MPR after completing military service and law school. He had a strong sense of MPR's mission, knew the federal broadcasting regulations, and was the defender of the organization.

Kigin eventually became the organization's general counsel and executive vice president. Often called the architect of MPR's statewide network, Kigin was also the designer of MPR's innovative corporate structure that navigated the waters between the for-profit and non-profit worlds. Along the way, he and Kling developed a close and complex working relationship. The more time they spent together, the more Kigin saw that Kling thrived on keeping a bunch of balls in the air at one time. They made a formidable team.

"I've often joked that I'm the guy who tells the emperor that he has no clothes," Kigin says. "That's why they don't let me near microphones or fundraisers."

Kling appreciated Kigin's ability to keep him grounded and to say what was or wasn't possible. For example, when MPR was launching WSCD-FM, its classical music station serving Duluth-Superior, Kling gave a speech in Duluth and announced that the MPR network was now complete—that with most of Minnesota's population able to receive MPR's signals, the organization could turn its attention to its next major undertaking. Kigin knew this was mistaken and that the network was far from finished, and he told Kling so.

Kigin lobbied hard to divide music and news programming into two separate Twin Cities radio channels. Kling and the MPR board were open to the idea,

and MPR approached the University of Minnesota to explore jointly operating its AM station KUOM as an all-news outlet. Each organization had its own vision for the project, and determined that the two perspectives were not compatible. Meanwhile, Kling's engineers reported there weren't frequencies available to build a second FM network, at least in the Twin Cities.



Bob Potter with Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich.

Kigin doggedly continued promoting the idea of a second station. When an AM frequency became available for purchase in 1979, he convinced Kling to take a chance. They agreed that acquiring a second station in the Twin Cities could be an excellent project to add to the capital campaign that they were planning.

“We were divided,” remembers longtime board member Susan Boren, who worked for Dayton Hudson Corporation as vice president of human resources. “The case for a new station became compelling because what we were seeing in print journalism and local radio suggested there was a wide-open opportunity for an in-depth news service. We thought, if not us, then who?”

Despite this support, the question remained: Would the news station steal listeners from the classical music station? Somehow MPR would have to learn how to encourage enough listeners to be fans of each format on its own—a challenge that MPR would revisit decades later when the organization began to see the opportunity, and the gamble, in adding a third channel.

The all-news AM experiment began in January 1980, when MPR bought WLOL-AM, a 5,000-watt commercial station operating at 1330 AM. MPR changed the call letters to KSJN-AM and began broadcasting news and public affairs programs. Noted journalist Rick Lewis was the first station manager. Lewis, then MPR's vice president for news and information, had been attracted



Linda Murray reviews a tape for broadcast.

to MPR after a stint as deputy director of the news division at NPR.

The new station's main competitor was WCCO-AM, long the region's number one source for news, weather information and farm commodity reports. In addition, it was the home of prominent Minnesota broadcast personalities of the time such as Charlie Boone, Roger Erickson, Howard Viken, and Joyce Lamont. WCCO had dominated the regional radio dial for years.

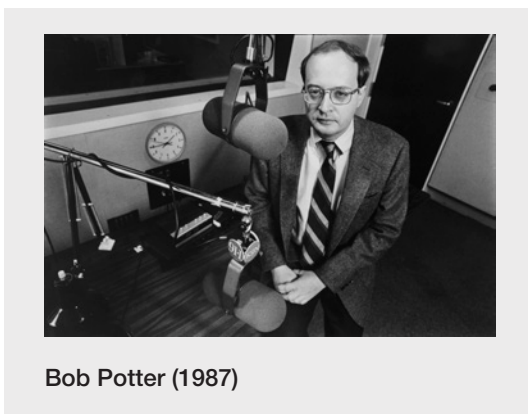
MPR planned its new station carefully. With generous financial support from the Northwest Area Foundation, KSJN-AM hired some new staff before going on the air January 14, 1980. KSJN-AM initially carried NPR's *All Things Considered*, the newly launched *Morning Edition*, documentaries from NPR on such topics as the Jonestown mass suicide, and various live events coverage, as well as the MPR-produced *Midday*, a public affairs program hosted by Bob Potter.

Initially, the KSJN-AM news service operated during limited hours, going off the air at night, as it found its feet. The plan was to gradually ramp up to a round-the-clock broadcasting schedule. But a strike at the



Bill Kling and Robert Jo Loggitz meet to finalize the purchase of WLOL 1330 AM, on December 31, 1979.

Minneapolis Star and *Minneapolis Tribune* newspapers in the fall of 1980 created an unanticipated opportunity—and a huge challenge—for MPR. Here was a chance to expand its news hours earlier than expected. People in Minneapolis and its suburbs increasingly turned to KSJN-AM while their daily newspapers were in turmoil.



Bob Potter (1987)

In June of 1980 the station began broadcasting eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, with a mix of news and music programming. KSJN signed off the air at either 11:00 PM (weekdays) or 1:00 AM (weekends) and signed on at 5 AM; it didn't broadcast 24 hours a day because there wasn't enough public radio news programming available at that time. The following year, the station added *As It Happens* and *Sunday Morning* from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). It also began broadcasting *Firing Line with William F. Buckley*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and *Africa Week*, giving it a wide-range mix of news coverage and arts and ideas programs which attracted a larger, more diverse audience.

The station's AM broadcast range was smaller than that of KSJN-FM, and the sound quality a bit rough to ears attuned to FM radio. One TV and radio critic said that KSJN-AM, stranded in the wrong radio band, and was a candidate for Radio Stations Anonymous. Few member donations came to MPR via the news station at first, but there was a plan to attract more listeners to draw in more financial support. Urged by Sally Pope, MPR changed the call letters to KNOW and programmed more seamless news hours and fewer specialty shows. With a staff of reporters stationed around the state, it gradually evolved into the news and information service that the leadership team had envisioned from the start.



Bill Kling, Dave Felland, Greg Barron, and Gary Eichten, 1978.

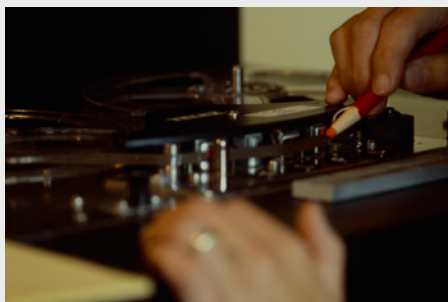
For many of MPR's news reporters, KSJN-AM represented a holy grail. That's what drew a young Cathy Wurzer, who had been working at KSTP-AM. She was first recommended to MPR by long-time radio personality DJ Leary of KDWB fame—a great talent scout. “I always had my eye there. I wanted to come to public radio because it represented serious journalism,” Wurzer remembers. Learning she had landed a news job at MPR, she recalls driving up to her parents' place in Northern Minnesota, running to the top of a hill, and screaming, “I made it! They hired me!”

There were about two dozen people in the KSJN-AM newsroom when Wurzer arrived in the early 1980s. “We were always the underdog,” she says. “We were a scrappy little organization that didn't have a whole lot of money.” Wurzer said after being at KSTP-AM, “it was fun to do serious radio” at MPR. She recalls doing interviews on the phone on the third floor of MPR's Saint Paul broadcast center and then “whacking them onto cartridge tapes, running

up to the fourth floor, throwing the tapes to my audio engineer, and breathlessly sliding behind the mic to do newscasts. We called those steps ‘the stairway to stardom.’”

Of course, many MPR listeners tuned into both services. The low-fidelity KNOW-AM signal, often heard on underpowered car radios while commuting, and the higher quality KSJN-FM signal both carried a wealth of talent and information. In addition to Eichten, Potter, and Wurzer, the MPR news staff included such popular and respected reporters as Dan Olson, Paula Schroeder, Bill Catlin, Mark Heistad, Stephen Smith, Doug Hamilton, Marilyn Hiebeler, Rich Dietman, Lee Axdahl, Dennis Hamilton, Kevin Burns, Jo Ann Shroyer, Loren Omoto, Bruce McDonald, and Beth Friend, among many others. Around the clock, these MPR journalists delivered award-

winning coverage of breaking news, politics, national and regional issues, the arts, education, crime and the courts, technology, and other beats. This era also marked the arrival of Nancy Fusion, Mary Losure, and Carol Howe, a contingent of new reporters who followed in the footsteps of earlier MPR pioneers like Dulcie Lawrence and Connie Goldman.



A producer marks tape with a red grease pencil to indicate where to cut the recording.



Loren Omoto



Connie Goldman began a prolific radio career at MPR. She went on to host *All Things Considered* for NPR before working as an independent radio producer and writer focusing on the topic of aging.

The success of the news channel in the Twin Cities jumpstarted the spread of news-devoted MPR stations around the region. But that expansion, too, generated controversy within MPR at the time. Kling, for instance, wondered if the organization was too stretched by trying to create and support the network of mixed-service stations around the state.

The organization had its hands full with its existing statewide news endeavor, at a time when the Twin Cities' KNOW had become constrained by the limits of low-power AM radio. Something had to change.

Dynamic Tension

On the FM dial, KSJN—along with most other MPR network stations in those years—began its broadcast day with the widely successful *The Prairie Home Morning Show*, developed and hosted by Keillor, and later *The Morning Show* hosted by Dale Connelly and Tom Keith, better known to his listeners as Jim Ed Poole. In the Twin Cities, morning classical music was played on the Minneapolis public school station KBEM which was leased to MPR for its morning hours.

Later in the day, KSJN shifted into classical music programming with such on-air hosts as Roger Gomoll, Mindy Ratner, Christine Sweet, Don Manildi, Bill Parker, Randy Bourne, Brian Newhouse, and Michael Barone. In the evening, KSJN and other network stations broadcast orchestra concerts and programs devoted to new music releases, the pipe organ, and regional artists, among other swaths of musical territory. Arthur Hoehn's *Music Through the Night* closed the day. Programs like *Saint Paul Sunday Morning*, the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, *The Jazz Image*, and *A Prairie Home Companion* were the weekend highlights.

Classical hosts were helping MPR grow in new ways with new sounds. As with many professions in the late 1970s and early 1980s, women were making in-roads into predominately male classical broadcasting.

Christine Sweet was one of those women when she came to MPR in 1982. Sweet was a trailblazer: the first female DJ at a pop station in 1976, the first full-time woman music host on WGBH in 1977, and the only woman at WMFT, a commercial classical station in Chicago. A subset of the WMFT audience had been viciously opposed to hearing women on the air, and Sweet had

received harassing phone calls from listeners indignant over the sound of a female voice introducing classical music on their radio. MPR listeners welcomed her.

Sweet applied for an open position at MPR and found support from many members of the staff. Marilyn Heltzer, who began as a volunteer with MPR in 1974 and later became the membership director, left a deep impression on Sweet as well as on the organization. Eventually serving as vice president for programming, Heltzer hired on-air talent, encouraged creativity, and worked from a strong love of classical music.

Heltzer helped Sweet find a welcoming home at MPR, where she had the freedom to program her own shows. Known to listeners for her on-air work and for readings she used to provide to listeners, Sweet still receives requests for recordings of long-time listeners favorites.

Mindy Ratner, another popular MPR classical voice, came in 1983 after stints at stations in Madison, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia. Ratner's warm and friendly on-air delivery became memorable as host of programs long beloved by MPR listeners: *Artists in Concert* and *Lund's Presents*, both featuring regional ensembles in performance; more than three decades of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day programming, along with *Candles Burning Brightly*, a program of Chanukah music; and music programming on the national Classical 24 service.



Christine Sweet—
Music Announcer/Producer



Marilyn Heltzer, the first membership director of MPR, in 1979.

When Ratner spent nearly two years in China (1998 to 1999) as a producer and host for the English Service of China Radio International, MPR listeners greatly missed her. In 2016, she produced a special program called “Kaddish: Reflections on the Holocaust in Music and Words.” The program aired on stations across the country and won the prestigious Gabriel Award from the Catholic Academy of Communication Professionals.

While female voices are now common on public radio broadcasts, Ratner and Sweet were the vanguards for MPR, and they are still an important part of today’s MPR Classical.

Female voices weren’t the only changes. Old rules of formality began to loosen. For classical music hosts, an encyclopedic musical knowledge diminished in importance. Far more important was their ability to translate the music into an accessible art form, a welcoming experience for the audience.

That happened in many ways. Hosts led with warmth and welcoming voices. Their on-air personalities engaged listeners, enriched the music, and made the audience want to tune in again. Classical music was sometimes deservedly



Mindy Ratner

judged as being elitist, but MPR's classical personalities worked to break those barriers, making classical music accessible to all. "I feel like my job as a classical music announcer is to find a way to relate to real people," says Ratner.

On both FM and AM, MPR offered its listeners a wealth of choices, and its programming would only grow more creative and sophisticated in the years ahead.

Capital City Expansion

By 1978, MPR desperately needed more space. People were sharing desks, and there were only two broadcast studios and two control boards. Considering the number of daily broadcasts being produced, was far from ideal. “We were patching programming together in inadequate facilities spread over five floors,” remembers Sally Pope.

In addition, the long-time home for KSJN and the news service in Park Square Court featured what some people alleged was the world’s slowest elevator, and the bar on the street level could sometimes draw a crowd that conflicted with the business of running a serious news organization. St. Patrick’s Day presented a particularly serious problem of merry revelers asleep in the elevator. The elevator and bar patrons presented challenges. However, neither interfered with the programming regularly broadcast from the Park Square Court studios.

At the same time, MPR’s classical music department still occupied the original KSJR studio at Saint John’s University, making communication and planning difficult with colleagues in Saint Paul.

In a late 1970s feasibility study, vice president of programming Nick Nash predicted that MPR would soon run out of room. As a result, it would have to rein in its creative energies. In the words of Bill Kling, if it hadn’t been able to find more space, “MPR would have succeeded itself right out of business.”

The prospect of investing nearly \$7 million in a new space sobered everyone. “The board was scared by that,” Kling says. “They wanted to say ‘no’ because we had no track record of ever taking on a project of that scale. But instead of



Park Square Court

saying no, they decided we could go ahead if we raised \$500,000 of the funding upfront and immediately.

The Board's willingness to consider Kling's proposals shows how well Kling worked with the people who held responsibility for MPR's future. They recognized that Kling was a visionary who liked to act on intuition when he saw an entrepreneurial opportunity for the organization. He favored bringing ideas to the Board and challenging its members to examine them as entrepreneurs themselves. The MPR Board members clearly did more than simply vote on MPR decisions while seated around a table; they advocated and spoke out to advance the interests of MPR and its members.

The Board also effectively defended the organization when real threats arose. In the early 1980s, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting provided

around 10% of MPR's budget. When incoming President Ronald Reagan envisioned a 50 percent cut to the CPB in 1981, or even the agency's complete elimination, MPR Board members rose to the challenge. They hounded their representatives in Congress, went to Washington to lobby on behalf of CPB, and helped spread the word of the importance of public funding for public broadcasting. The cuts to CPB were limited to six percent, in part due to the work of MPR Board members.

The Board could see that buying and completely redesigning a large building in downtown Saint Paul presented a financial risk. But MPR could reach its potential and bring the greatest benefit to its listeners only if it had a broadcast center worthy of its ambitions.

MPR's first capital campaign was begun to finance the project. The Board required \$500,000 in lead gifts. That gift arrived almost overnight from long-time listeners and supporters Sarah-Maud and Bob Sivertsen, and was matched by an equal gift from the Saint Paul Foundation, then led by Paul Verret. Verret was an entrepreneur himself and viewed MPR as one of the great assets of Minnesota and of Saint Paul.

Those two early gifts met the Board's challenge and the capital campaign was on. Although MPR had never before raised anything close to the necessary \$7 million goal, the capital campaign that was detailed in concept. Led by Vice President Sally Pope and fed by her many contacts in corporate and private philanthropy of the Twin Cities, the capital campaign was a success.

Concerned that MPR might someday consider moving to the larger city of Minneapolis, Verret included a condition that was common to the many grants made by the Saint Paul Foundation: MPR must remain in Saint Paul. Bill Kling had in fact eyed a couple of potential locations in Minneapolis.

But with support from Verret and Saint Paul Mayor George Latimer, MPR bought a building at Seventh and Cedar Street in downtown Saint Paul. Originally a home for a federal savings and loan complete with built-in vaults,



Nick Nash, Sally Pope, Tom Kigin, and Bill Kling (1979)

the two-story structure cost about \$6 million to buy, remodel, and fill with new equipment designed to make it the finest public radio production facility in the nation.

To that end, MPR engaged the architectural firm of Leonard Parker Associates to design the remodeled building. A master architect, Parker also

designed the Minnesota Judicial Building, the University of Minnesota's Law School and Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, and the Minneapolis Convention Center. He filled his office with quotes he had coined, including "Find out what you're here to do. Do the best you possibly can. And do it all the time."

Parker reveled in the complexity of the MPR project. This headquarters needed to work well for the people who would use it and to succeed aesthetically—a tall order.

Parker added two stories to the building and his first concept called for a red metal clad structure. He was describing that concept to a board committee as "red means hot, red means passion, red means courage," when Sally Pope famously said: "Leonard, red means stop!" In the next concept plans, Parker changed to maroon brick.

Teamed with acoustical designers Robert A. Hanson Associates, MPR's own staff worked to design build the facility's high-tech recording studios on the top floor. "I spent so much time with them, I now print like an architect," says former MPR Vice President of Production Tom Voegeli.

When the building was completed, it had ample room for 80 Twin Cities-based MPR employees. The third floor provided space for one of the largest classical music libraries in the country. The western face of the building exterior featured an electronic news ticker that displayed breaking news day and night, an element that Kling insisted upon in order to gain the visibility he thought public radio should command. MPR moved into the new space in October 1980.

The new space "gave us a real big physical presence in the downtown area, less than a mile from the state capitol, which was a big deal," says Gary Eichten. "Just our physical presence here added to our credibility. It wasn't like we were some goofy little station in the middle of nowhere that nobody could find."

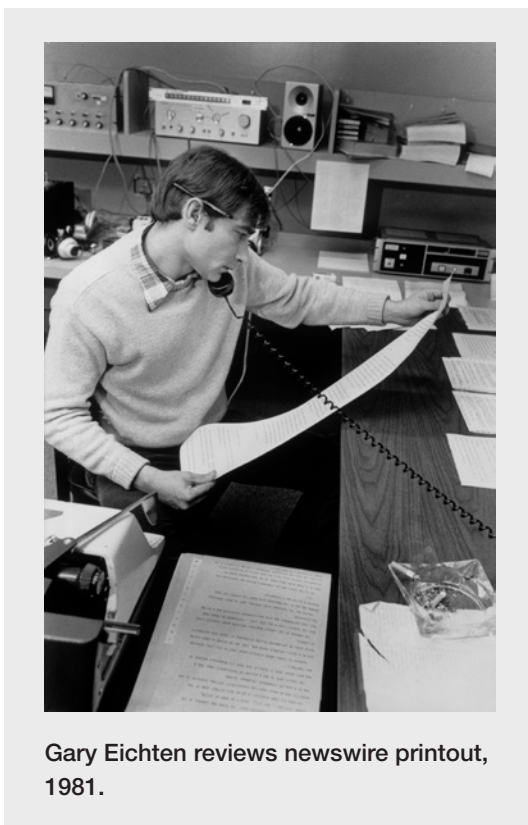
The new building also upped expectations. "Everything we were doing had to be to a higher standard. We were getting out a better signal, we were getting out better programs," says Nick Nash who headed the programming department



MPR staff watch as a piano is lifted by crane up to the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Recording Studio.

in the late 1970s as the building was designed. “The days of public radio as a guild ended, and public radio as an enterprise arrived.”

Thanks to modernized technology, enhanced studio capabilities and a world-class studio that had artists eager for a chance to record in it, now many more people around the world would be able to hear groundbreaking MPR programming. The improvements made possible by the new facilities succeeded in lifting the quality of programming not just for the region, but for the nation.



Gary Eichten reviews news wire printout, 1981.

Essay by

Marilyn Carlson Nelson

I have listened to and enjoy immensely Minnesota Public Radio for all these many years that it has been broadcasting. But if I am truthful, I came to fully appreciate the monumental role MPR serves in our community and the nation through marriage.

Even though Glen David Nelson and I attended Edina High School together and lived just a few miles apart, we would need to travel more than a thousand miles to finally meet. I was enrolled at Smith College. He attended Harvard. When we did meet, our start was in no way reflective of “Minnesota Nice.” Glen showed up an hour and a half early to a mixer I had arranged for my class at Smith, and he brought along eight uninvited football teammates who expected me to host them for dinner. But I eventually did get even with Glen Nelson. I married him.

Throughout our 58 years together, I often thought how appropriate it was that Harvard’s motto is this one word—“Veritas.” It always seemed to me that Glen’s constant search for the “Truth” was the driving force that not only defined his lifework as a surgeon, as an executive in the medical device industry and investor and advisor of med-tech enterprises, but it also inspired the admiration of so many.

It was the pursuit of “Veritas” that would attract Glen to MPR’s commitment to fact-based, balanced, excellent journalism. He would serve on MPR’s board of directors for a dozen years, two years as its chairman and later as an honorary trustee. Throughout those years, Glen’s decision to give of his time, talent and resources to MPR was affirmed over and over again . . . sometimes in interesting ways.

He would frequently tout the voluminous expressions of support the station received, but many were surprised when Glen spoke even more proudly of listener criticism. He pointed out that there was about an equal amount of criticism from liberals about programming as there was from conservatives. So, he deduced, MPR was obviously doing something very right.

Glen was also encouraged by the fact that MPR listeners are known to be highly engaged in the community—more likely to vote, to volunteer and to donate to causes that Minnesotans care about. This fueled his belief that there would be a greater chance for a positive outcome to the challenges we face because he knew that MPR listeners had been impartially and deeply informed on the issues. I shared his optimism.

I had become increasingly aware of the critical role strong and free media play in the formation and sustainability of democracies when I became a board member of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). To advance its mission, the endowment invests heavily in the promotion of essential freedoms, most notably, in efforts to establish freedom of the press around the globe. NED also comes to the aid of imprisoned and sometimes tortured journalists

in countries where an independent press poses a threat to the prevailing powers. I learned of countless examples of how essential free and fair media is to emerging democracies and why it must never be taken for granted as a pillar of stability in established democracies.

This appreciation for the value of independent and responsible media further strengthened Glen's and my support of MPR as a trusted convener of experts around complex issues. It also aligned perfectly with our overall philanthropic strategy. We had agreed to support excellence and best practices. In May, 2015, Glen and I would have the opportunity to support an historic intersection of two excellent Minnesota institutions: MPR and the Minnesota Orchestra.

It had been 85 years since the then Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra had played in Havana, Cuba. Now, with a start to the normalization of relations with Cuba, a softening of decades long heated—at times perilous—political discourse and the relaxing of embargoes, the Minnesota Orchestra was chosen to be the first major American orchestra to perform in Cuba since the revolution. Glen and I had been great enthusiasts of the orchestra for decades and eagerly supported this gesture of reconciliation between Cuba and The U.S. We also agreed that MPR should make it possible for its entire audience to have a seat in the concert hall for this historic event.

As a life member of the orchestra board and its newly appointed vice-chair, I attended the Havana concerts. The Minnesota delegation was warmly received. The orchestra was brilliant, the

mixed audience of Cubans and Americans was jubilant . . . many times on their feet. Listening to the orchestra, I remember thinking, “This is what building a bridge sounds like.”

The only great disappointment for me was that Glen, who was recovering from a serious health situation at the time, was unable to be with us in Cuba. But he—like many millions of others—enjoyed the live concert broadcasts from the Teatro Nacional courtesy of MPR.

Both Glen and I hoped this historic cultural exchange would mark the start of a new beginning in diplomatic and cultural relations, but we had no idea that it would mark the beginning of a battle with successive health issues that would take Glen’s life exactly one year later.

The search for “Veritas.” A commitment to excellence. In service to mankind. Those were Glen’s guiding principles in all that he did.

Former president of MPR and APM, Bill Kling, perhaps summarized this best at Glen’s funeral when he said, “I saw first-hand, his analytical mind, his curiosity, his willingness to take risks, his interest and willingness to listen, his impatience with unfulfilled opportunities. Those are some of the attributes that made him a success and made MPR a success. We were fortunate to have him. More of us need to be like him.”

From my perspective, Bill Kling not only built a great treasure for our state in MPR but he recognized one as well in Glen Nelson who had the privilege and joy of counting Minnesota Public Radio as a lasting part of his legacy.

A Fight for Turf at a Technology Frontier

MPR's new position on a worldwide stage was made possible via technology found in two places: a small area of the new headquarters that housed the network's new satellite "uplink" and "downlink" equipment, and a massive satellite dish located east of St. Paul on Burlington Northern land thanks to arrangements made possible by MPR board member and BN executive Frank Coyne.



Satellite dish installation, 1979.

Since its founding, NPR had distributed programs from its Washington headquarters to stations around the country through telephone lines that were insufficient to provide the bandwidth needed for satisfying high fidelity and stereo sound. The sound was OK at best.

Other producers sent out programs on tape or on long-play records, often through the mail. This included producers of classical music programs featuring the concert series of the Cleveland and Chicago Symphony orchestras. Similarly, MPR shipped its regional stories from one station to another on tape, requiring a trip to the nearest Greyhound bus depot to send or retrieve the package.

As early as the mid 1970s, Kling had seen satellite interconnection as critical to MPR's future. By 1978, Kling was working with colleagues at other public radio stations to strengthen the ability of stations to participate as national



Dick Daly and Bob Potter covering the 1978 election.

producers. In the process, he gained an inside knowledge of the capabilities of the planned public radio satellite system. Satellite interconnection would not only give MPR access to a wealth of high-fidelity, stereophonic programs bounced from an orbiting satellite transponder, but also make it possible for stations and systems like MPR to deliver programming to the rest of the world. Kling was eventually appointed the head of the technology committee of The Association of Public Radio Stations (the Washington D.C.-based entity he had founded some years earlier) that would produce a plan for the radio version of what was seen as the public television satellite system.

However, NPR had other ideas. It proposed a single satellite “uplink” site at its own facilities in Washington and four stereo channels. According to Nick Nash, MPR’s vice president of programming, “Bill and his committee of station managers were aggressive in telling CPB staff, including a retired Navy Admiral who was building the project to military standards, that ‘No, we need 24 channels—a full transponder—not four channels. We needed regional “uplinks” so that Boston, Saint Paul, Los Angeles, Seattle, and even smaller

locations like Ames, Iowa, could all transmit programs.’

According to Nash, “NPR’s president, Frank Mankiewicz, and Bill had a series of disagreements about establishing a decentralized system versus what Frank wanted, which was a Washington-based system.” Mankiewicz told Kling he always thought “uplinks” referred to

the front nine. After taking a risk in proposing 24 channels and 13 uplinks or nothing, Kling and the station managers were given 24 hours to decide where to place the uplinks.

“They had won a key battle.” Nash says. Kling and the station managers on his committee, including Wayne Roth from Denver, Don Forsling from Ames, and former FCC Commissioner Kenneth Cox from Seattle representing the University of Washington station, were successful in advocating for the satellite system that enabled mass distribution of live and recorded programming.

The system was not without critics. Some people worried that a flood of new programming would overwhelm the capacity of stations to carry those shows, as well as the temptation for stations to neglect their own home-produced programs.

However, for MPR, the benefits outweighed those worries, which never became real problems. MPR already produced many programs suited for national distribution: its Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra broadcasts, the long-form documentaries and investigative reports, *A Prairie Home Companion*, *Pipedreams*, regular daily news reports from Minnesota and other programs. Many were already distributed on tape. A satellite uplink would make them available to more stations and at the same time of day.



Tom Kigin oversees the installation of the satellite uplink dish on the MPR building.



Audio engineer and producer Tom Voegeli produced the sound for many MPR programs, such as *The Splendid Table* and the radio dramatizations of *Star Wars*.

That capability encouraged MPR to nationally distribute even more programs in the years to come, including *Saint Paul Sunday* and *The Splendid Table*. Now MPR, as well as other stations with a story or program that didn't interest NPR, could put it up on 'the bird,' as the public radio satellite was called, and other stations could broadcast it. The uplink feed was an inexpensive enhancement with substantial benefits.

Kling's advocacy allowed MPR to become one of thirteen public radio station-based producers in the U.S. with the ability to upload its own programs via satellite to the approximately 230 other stations that could download them—the "downlink." The satellite interconnection and transmission system allowed up to 24 channels or twelve stereo programs at any given time, for the exchange of programming. The sound quality was exceptional.

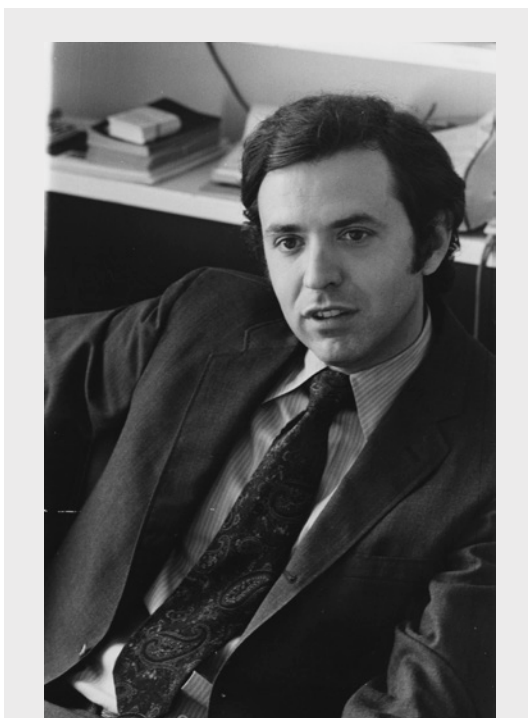
Once the satellite system went live in 1980, MPR took the lead and bought a portable uplink dish on a trailer, using it to transmit live programs to stations around the country. Soon summer concerts from the Aspen and

Santa Fe Chamber Music festivals, and concerts performed as part of a Twin Cities convention of the American Guild of Organists were broadcast to larger audiences.

Most dramatically, it turned *A Prairie Home Companion* into a national sensation broadcasting it from cities and towns throughout the country. One memorable show required the portable satellite dish to be sent by barge from Honolulu to Nihau for a live *APHC* winter show. The show quickly gained the widest distribution of any series not produced or distributed by NPR.

“It was the same show afterward,” Keillor says of the live national distribution made possible by satellite. “We didn’t do anything different.” But a much bigger audience was suddenly listening to it.

The new capabilities also attracted new technical talent to MPR. The arrival of the satellite uplink system drew Linda Murray, a young engineer recruited from classical station WCAL in Northfield, to MPR. Murray began as the assistant operations manager when the satellite uplink was about to debut, an exciting time to work in broadcast engineering.



Bill Kling



Linda Murray



Bob Potter, Dick Daly, Janet Carter, Linda Murray (seated), and Lynne Cruise record a story for MPR News.

Murray was eager to learn on the job and MPR engineer Lynne Cruise mentored Murray in an profession that had been dominated by men. MPR welcomed her expertise. “As long as you were capable of getting the job done, it really didn’t matter whether you were male or female,” Murry says.

Cruise was highly respected for the perfectionism she displayed in both broadcasts and commercially released recordings, including Garrison Keillor’s *News from Lake Wobegon* and pianist Butch Thompson’s eponymously titled album, both released in 1979. Cruise passed along much of what she knew to Murray, who would eventually become MPR’s Director of Operations.

MPR’s technical staff, including Lynne Cruise and Linda Murray, demonstrated the professionalism and commitment to perfection in programming MPR listeners were coming to expect from every broadcast.

At Home in the World Theater

While MPR's technical capabilities were growing, providing a site for live broadcasts was becoming a challenge. Just a couple blocks from MPR's headquarters sat a moldering wreck of a building that offered tantalizing possibilities.

Garrison Keillor remembers the first time he walked into the World Theater in the late 1970s. "It had been a second-run movie house and was very marginal," he says. "It was kind of a mess."

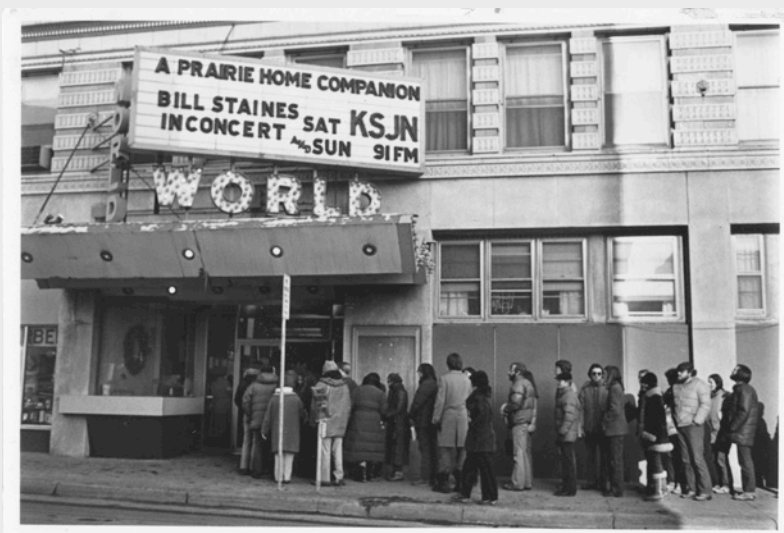
Built in 1910 for vaudeville, the World Theater was teetering close to demolition. It had a big movie screen, a decorated proscenium, a false ceiling over the seating, and a second balcony that had been closed off for decades. But you could stand on the apron of that stage and look straight up to the farthest seat in the balcony—the same distance as home plate to first base, 90 feet. The house was tight and high, just perfect for a live radio show.

The owners of the World Theater were Bob and Shirley Dworsky, parents of Rich Dworsky, the long-time music director and pianist of *APHC*. They proposed a ridiculously cheap monthly rent. MPR accepted the terms and *A Prairie Home Companion* moved in during 1978.

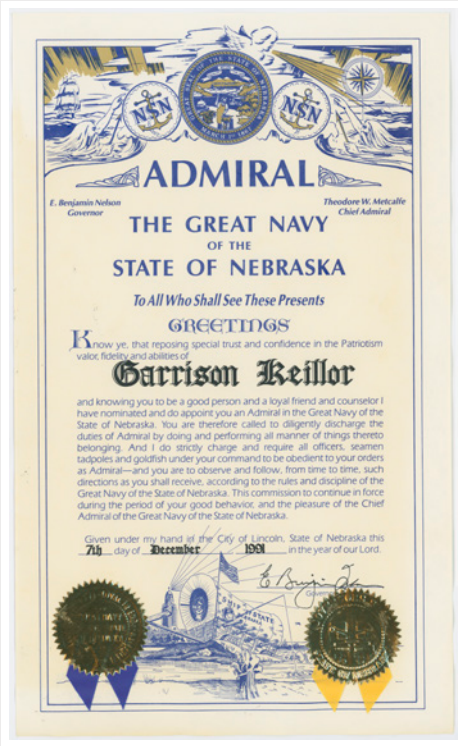
Now at home in the World Theater, *A Prairie Home Companion* was reaching new heights of artistry and popularity by the early 1980s. A flood of press attention signaled the arrival as a true national phenomenon. *APHC* had become the perfect platform for Keillor's fertile imagination, and he was alone in using the radio medium to blend music, humor, parody, storytelling, and scripted scenes.



The World Theater in downtown St. Paul becomes a popular place on Saturdays for live broadcasts of *A Prairie Home Companion*.



A crowd lines up to see *A Prairie Home Companion* at the World Theater in St. Paul, February 1980, the same year it was purchased by MPR. It was renovated in 1986 and renamed The Fitzgerald Theater in 1994.



Proclamation appointing Garrison Keillor as an admiral of the Great Navy of the State of Nebraska.



Document establishing a Sister City "Agreement" between Los Angeles and Lake Wobegon.



Garrison Keillor's Nebraska Admiral license.

Through live broadcasts of *APHC*, people around the country were hearing about MPR for the first time. Keillor's program raised the national profile of other MPR programs including live orchestra broadcasts, *Saint Paul Sunday Morning*, and *Pipedreams*.

After earning a Peabody Award for Excellence in Broadcasting, *A Prairie Home Companion* had taken on a life of its own. The show's fans included NBC *Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw, who said no one was allowed to disturb him during Keillor's weekly monologue, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, who grew up in Saint Paul, refused to accept social invitations that conflicted with the broadcast.

Such a show needed the stability of a permanent home and MPR set out to find one.

Aided by Saint Paul Mayor George Latimer, an instrumental liaison, MPR bought the World Theater from the Dworskys in 1981.

But within a few years, plaster from the ceiling began falling into the seating and the theater was condemned by the city. While MPR worked on restoring the theater, *A Prairie Home Companion* would have no permanent home for the next two years. Many of its shows were performed a few blocks away at another cavernous decaying venue, the Orpheum Theater, subsequently recently renovated and reopened as The Palace Theater.

Through a creative "Save the World" campaign, MPR raised \$3.5 million



Garrison Keillor on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, September 1986.

for the renovation of the crumbling theater. Completed in 1986, the renovation transformed the theater from dangerous obsolescence to modernity while maintaining the building's historic character and beauty. It included a new glass-enclosed atrium at the entrance, restored ornamental plasterwork, and brought in new sound and broadcast equipment, as well as all-new mechanical and electrical systems.

MPR celebrated the theater's reopening with an event that included a live PBS national telecast of a benefit performance of *A Prairie Home Companion* and the nibbling of Powdermilk Biscuit canapés, followed by an open house and block party.

The theater's restoration added vitality to a sleepy section of downtown and sparked the redevelopment of nearby properties, such as the History Theater and the Saint Paul Conservatory of Music building, and later home to the McNally Smith College of Music, including the courtyard that once hosted *APHC* live performances. It all was typical of the Saint Paul civic attitude of the times: the Dworskys owning and preserving the space long enough to save it from demolition, and MPR completing the job with a dramatic renovation while maintaining the historic nature of the original building and welcoming in the public.

Soon the World Theater became a popular venue for hosting concerts, cultural events, and political debates in addition to *A Prairie Home Companion* live broadcasts.

Live Music Gets a Singular Home

Although the newly restored theater was excellent for live performances and broadcasts, it wasn't ideal for high-quality sound recordings. Another space in MPR's new headquarters, one very different from the area that housed the blinking panels of the satellite uplink equipment, also had a strong influence on the organization's programs and capabilities.

For some time, the idea of a high-end music studio had been taking shape in the mind of Vice President of Production Tom Voegeli. "I had the crazy idea that we should have a music recording studio, which was really my love," Voegeli says.

While the building was being planned, Voegeli discussed with Kling the possibility of including a top-flight recording facility. Part of the fourth-floor space Voegeli had his eye on for the facility was originally designed as Kling's own office. Voegeli explained that because the building was on a busy intersection, the studio needed to be as high as possible to isolate it from traffic noise. It also needed a high ceiling, which only the new top floor of the building could provide.

Kling agreed, but there was no money for the studio in the project budget. Once again, angel supporters came to the rescue, and MPR received a gift to build the new studio from long-time supporters Sarah-Maud and Bob Sivertsen. The Sivertsens realized that if the studio wasn't built now, it never would be.

Named the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Music Studio in honor of Mrs. Sivertsen's mother, the facility allowed MPR to undertake a type of programming that few other public radio broadcasters could handle: the in-house live broadcast

and recording of large ensembles of musicians like the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. The studio had lots of space, a cutting edge 24-track, digital tape system donated by 3M, advanced multitrack post-production equipment, and facilities that made producing video and film soundtracks possible. MPR's first program regularly broadcast from the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Studio was *Saint Paul Sunday Morning*, later called *Saint Paul Sunday*.

Conductor and host Bill McGlaughlin described the program this way: "We're playing chamber music in people's living rooms. It's Sunday morning. They're still in their bathrobes. After we play, we talk." There was more to the show than that, and listeners prized the intimacy and spontaneity that *Saint Paul Sunday* provided.

Voegeli created *Saint Paul Sunday*, and he remembers the inspiration for the title. "It seemed to me that if you didn't listen to classical music at any other time, Sunday morning was when you might listen to it. I had the picture of listeners getting their bagels out and getting *The New York Times*, and maybe it was a time for classical music to coexist with the other kinds of music people listened to," he says. "I loved the idea because I'd grown up around it. My dad, as a musician, recorded a lot in studio, and he would take me with him to Chicago to record commercial music and jingles."

Saint Paul Sunday initially hosted only regional musicians in the studio. But thanks to distribution on stations across the country, the show grew to become the nation's most popular classical music program. *Saint Paul Sunday* producer Mary Lee was soon booking international artists such as cellist Lynn Harrell, the Modern Jazz Quartet, and violinist Pinchas Zukerman. The program remained in distribution for some 30 years, and brought to listeners the artistry of such musicians as Joshua Bell, Dawn Upshaw, the Dale Warland Singers, the Guarneri String Quartet, and Leif Ove Andsnes.

MPR took on post-production projects in the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Studio. One of the earliest for-hire projects was a 1981 radio adaptation of

Star Wars made for NPR. Productions of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* soon followed.

The studio also brought programmatic excitement and welcome rental income that helped fund other MPR production projects. The Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Studio was so well designed, and such a marvel of engineering, that it quickly became a much-sought-after recording space for local and touring artists, providing another opportunity for MPR in the form of recording sessions booked out by musicians of all types.

A few decades later, the studio would prove pivotal when MPR added *The Current*. A new, equally appreciative generation of touring musicians began coming on a weekly basis to record performances and interviews.

Today, all three MPR services use the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Studio throughout the week, as do many of the national programs produced in Minnesota, and this crown jewel of the building continues to showcase some of the most important cultural voices of the time.

Pretty Good Goods

In little more than a decade, MPR evolved from a poorly funded group of public radio stations with little financial security to a healthy, growing, and stable public radio organization.

This change happened because MPR's early financial hardships had made it scrappy and entrepreneurial. Kling and other MPR leaders wanted to keep giving listeners high-quality programming that was interesting to people across the country—an expensive goal. They looked to new and unorthodox initiatives that could help make MPR financially strong. That explains the 1981 origins of MPR Product Marketing.

It all began, Kling says, when he and Keillor were in one of their “ping pong arguments”—intermittent discussions, conducted in bursts, that could last for months. Keillor wanted to offer free Powdermilk Biscuit posters, whimsical promotions for *A Prairie Home Companion's* imaginary underwriter, to listeners of *A Prairie Home Companion*.

Kling thought it would be too expensive to print and mail them, perhaps as much as \$40,000 depending on the number of requests. “No, it won't,” Garrison said. “It won't be a problem. Nobody will respond. I'll just feel better if we do it.”

Kling remembers that “We went back and forth like ping pong balls. And finally I thought this seemed really important to him. It belonged in Sally Pope's area of community relations and she agreed. So we did it.”

She remembers that another reason that Kling may have agreed to the poster offer. Cargill, the underwriter of *A Prairie Home Companion*, was interested in getting a feel for where listeners to the show lived around the country. The

response to offering a free poster might provide good information to them and to MPR.

Nobody was prepared when, after an announcement on the live radio show, 20,000 listeners mailed in requests for the Powdermilk Biscuit posters. “The response to that first poster offer was so completely surprising to us,” recalls Sally Pope. “We needed to gather volunteers, family members, and even staff members at the end of work days to get the posters mailed out.”

Producing and mailing that many posters could easily have caused a significant deficit in the MPR’s budget. In an attempt to recoup some of the cost, the back of the free Powdermilk Biscuit poster included an offer to sell *APHC*-related products that had been previously created as Membership Week thank-you gifts to donors, including T-shirts, coffee mugs, postcards and recordings from the show.

Sales of those items did more than offset the cost of mailing the free poster. MPR came away with more than \$10,000 in net profit from the orders, a pleasant surprise. “It was a catalogue!” said many.

But it wasn’t Kling’s nature to be totally satisfied. He was often saying, “That’s great—what’s next?” And now he was willing to bet merchandise sales represented a successful business in the making.

Donna Avery, then the publisher of MPR’s member publication *Minnesota Monthly*, was given the assignment of setting up a new division called Product Marketing and figuring out what was next.

This new effort was a big departure from what some people saw as the function of a public radio organization. For MPR, like every non-profit organization, sales of goods and services raise difficult questions of taxation and competition with the commercial marketplace. In addition, as the business grew, Product Marketing had to learn how to develop products, do large-volume catalog mailings, manage inventory, ship orders, and keep track of billing and collection.



A dancing bottle of salsa spices up the stage of *APHC* during the 10th Anniversary tour.

But the effort was unquestionably worthwhile. In its first year, Product Marketing took in \$181,000, about \$20,000 from the sale of *A Prairie Home Companion*-related products alone. Volunteers at tables in the lower levels of MPR's broadcast center packed and shipped out merchandise.

From the small product base launched by the free Powdermilk Biscuit poster, Avery created the *Wireless* catalog, which tempted readers with *A Prairie Home Companion* merchandise plus other quirky gift options. The operation never operated at a loss, and doubled sales annually during its initial years.

General Counsel and Executive Vice President Tom Kigin set about creating an organizational structure to allow this new commercial retail business to contribute to the operations of non-profit MPR without triggering legal complications. There were few models in the non-profit world for how this could be done, because many organizations feared revenue from for-profit activities would imperil their non-profit status.

The solution Kigin found was to separately incorporate the for-profit

business. By the mid-1980s, MPR had spun-off Product Marketing to Rivertown Trading Company (RTC), a new for-profit company owned by Minnesota Communications Group (MCG).

The business continued its rapid growth, and Avery moved Rivertown operations from the MPR headquarters building to several buildings and warehouses around the Twin Cities. Its largest warehouse in Woodbury was massive. Huge, steel roller coaster-like structures, all computer controlled, moved the merchandise around the facility, where staff selected products from inventory. Once items were placed in boxes on conveyor belts, the orders traveled down the line for packing and shipping. It was a sophisticated order fulfillment operation that foreshadowed the later warehousing innovations of Amazon and others.

Avery also added a wide variety of merchandise that went beyond to supplement goods directly related to *A Prairie Home Companion*. During the 1980s and 1990s, the *Wireless* catalog featured books on learning how to juggle and make sound effects with your mouth; the Tick Tock Cat, a plastic feline whose eyes moved back and forth; a t-shirt that said “If Mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy”; and cow-themed merchandise, including Holstein-embroidered ties and cow-face oven mitts. The ever-popular cassette-taped monologues from Keillor’s show were always well represented.

Fans of *A Prairie Home Companion* made up most of the early customers, but the audience widened quickly. “In the early days we had a lot of teachers. And then oddly we had a lot of investment bankers,” Avery says. “They apparently share the same sense of humor.”



Overhead view of the shipping department of the Rivertown Trading Company circa 1995.



Bob Potter and Dick Daly at the 1986 State Independent Republican Convention.

MPR's entrepreneurial spirit continued to inspire growth. In turn, that success challenged MPR to continue to examine its organizational structure. The guiding idea was that separating the non-profit and for-profit enterprises would address concerns that MPR could use money raised as a tax-exempt charity or recipient of government support to fund its for-profit businesses.

In 1986, MPR formed two new corporations: the for-profit Greenspring Company, designed to hold MPR's profit-making enterprises completely separate from MPR's non-profit activities, and the non-profit Minnesota Communications Group (MCG), later known as American Public Media Group (APM Group or APMG), the new parent of both MPR and Greenspring.

The new legal entities were designed to be separate, but related. Greenspring's

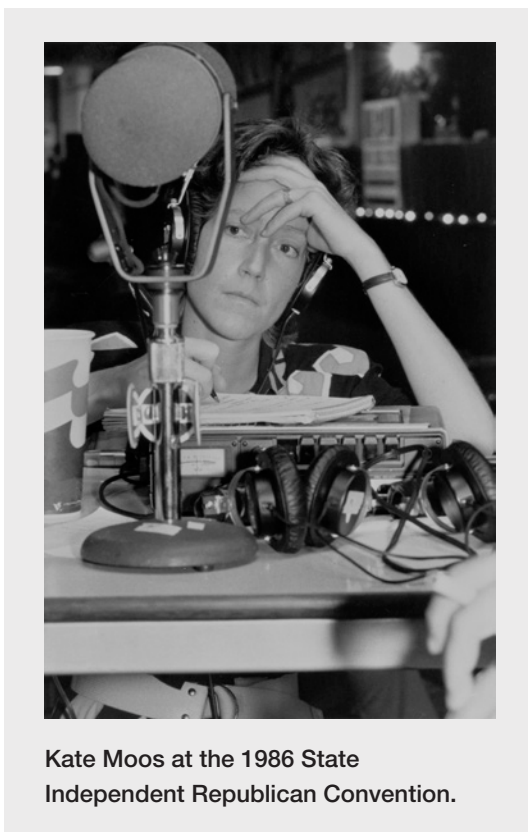
board of directors was led by local finance executive and volunteer Conley Brooks Jr. and some MPR board members, including Chairman Tom McBurney, formerly President of Pillsbury International, and Kling, served on both boards. All board members of MCG were also board members of MPR.

Under the new structure, money and assets could not pass from non-profit MPR to for-profit Greenspring. However, funds could flow from Greenspring to the non-profit corporations. Greenspring made regular payments to MPR in

the form of royalties and charitable contributions, and to MCG in the form of dividends.

“It was my responsibility to make sure all of that worked,” says Kigin, who served as general counsel of each organization. “I was always thinking about who was on which board and how we could do this. We had the burden of board meetings and minutes and resolutions and finances for three different organizations. It’s one of those things that you shouldn’t try at home, and you’d better have a good reason to do it, because it’s complicated and time consuming.”

In building this complex structure, Kigin and his legal and accounting advisors had broken new ground. “It has always surprised me,” says MPR board member Susan Boren, “as a student of not-for-profit organizations, that more of them didn’t create this sooner. I always had a hard time with the criticism of it because it allowed the organization to fund good work in a legitimate way



Kate Moos at the 1986 State Independent Republican Convention.



Mike Mulcahy at the 1986 State Independent Republican Convention.

that didn't require asking people for more money.”

Kling called this type of organization and funding “social purpose capitalism”, the passing of business profits to a non-profit organization that benefits the community. “It required brilliant thinking, and Tom is a brilliant thinker.”

The Once and Future *Morning Show*

A Prairie Home Companion's rising popularity gave Garrison Keillor little time for his other MPR activities, and in 1982 he permanently left his daily morning radio program on the classical service, which drew a large and faithful audience appreciative of the host's fictitious and humorous Lake Wobegon sponsors and broad musical tastes.

Essay by

Kate DiCamillo

Twenty-two years ago, I moved from Clermont, Florida to Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was thirty years old.

I had never been to Minnesota.

I had no job.

I had no mittens, no hat.

I didn't own a proper winter coat.

I thought: how cold can it be?

People kept taking hold of my hand and looking me in the eye in and saying in a very solemn sort of way: "But why did you move from Florida to Minnesota?"

I had a variety of answers for this question, but the truest answer can be summed up in one word: desperation.

I was desperate.

I had known for a long time that I wanted to be a writer.

I told people that I was a writer. I read books on writing. I imagined getting a book published.

But I didn't write.

I knew something had to change, and I didn't know how to change it. I was young enough, still, to think that something dramatic, something big, had to happen in order for me to begin.

And so when a good friend moved to Minnesota and needed a roommate, I thought: that's it! That's what I'll do! I'll move to Minnesota and then I will become a writer!

And so I moved. Without a hat, without mittens, without a proper winter coat.

I started listening to 99.5 as soon as I arrived. The weather talk alarmed me; the music comforted me. Minnesota Public Radio became a way for me to center myself, locate myself, here—in a new world.

Soon, I got a job.

I worked for a book distributor called The Bookmen. The Bookmen was an old warehouse filled with books. It was filled with people who loved to read books, and talk about books.

And after ten years of talking about writing, I began to write.

My shift at the Bookmen started at 7 a.m. My alarm was set for 4:30. I would get up while the world was still dark, and I would write my two pages; and then I would go out into the kitchen and make myself a piece of toast with butter and marmalade on it, and I would sit in the breakfast nook and eat my toast and listen to the Morning Show on 99.5.

The breakfast nook had a window that faced east. Morning after morning, I got up early and wrote; and when I was done, I sat and stared at the sky and ate my toast and listened to the radio.

And one morning, I realized something.

I realized that I was happy.

I was exactly where I wanted to be, doing exactly what I wanted to do.

The sky in the east was violet.

The radio was playing.

Jim Ed Poole told me that it was going to be a clear, very cold, day.

I thought: here I am, where I should be.

And for me that is what Minnesota Public Radio has been ever since my arrival to Minnesota, a reminder in words and music, that I am exactly where I want to be: here. Home.



A billboard encouraging drivers to tune into Classical MPR stands in defiance of the dreary February sky. (1997)

Dale Connelly was born in Yonkers, NY and brought to the Midwest when he was 12. He calls the Midwestern laid-backness you hear in his on air voice a “complete put on; a defensive measure to make it possible to live here.”

Connelly started at MPR right out of college, and joined the News Department in 1976. He stayed with the network for 35 years. “I was an awful reporter,” he later said, “because I didn’t like talking to strangers.” In the late 1970’s,

Connelly assumed *Morning Show* co-hosting duties from Bill Parker, who had been in the role since Keillor left a year before.

Tom Keith, whose father played “Pop Wiggins” on KSTP AM’s *Sunset Valley Barn Dance*, grew up in West Saint Paul. He spent four years in the Marines and majored in broadcasting at the University of Minnesota. Legend has it that MPR hired him as an engineer after he appeared out of the blue in the Park Square Court foyer and asked for a job.

Together, the hosting team of Connelly and Keith developed memorable characters and moments for the long-running *Morning Show*, including a report on the annual frozen waffle harvest in northern Minnesota, an April Fool’s Day technical emergency in which Dale and Jim Ed asked listeners to call in if they couldn’t hear the show, and traffic reports from a hot-air balloon. The co-hosts took silly song requests for birthdays and listeners’ other special occasions, including frequent demands for “Little Potato” by Metamora. It was a gentle Midwest style of humor.



Tom Keith and Dale Connelly, hosts of the *Morning Show*.

On the *Morning Show*, Keith played such characters as Bart the Bear, Bath tub Safety Officer Rafferty, genetically-altered food proponent Dr. Larry Kyle, and brusque seaman Cap'n Billy. But he was best known for playing Jim Ed Poole, a character named by Keillor.

Keith, originally the show's control board operator, was a remarkable mimic and sound-effects man who could moo, woof, cluck, and do helicopters, handsaws, and garbage trucks, as well as a one-of-a-kind vocalization of a man falling from a great height into piranha-infested waters. Keith had the inspired ability to infuse a horse whinny with nobility, vulnerability, and emotion.

For years, Connelly introduced Jim Ed's mumbling and minimalist sports bulletins with, "He knows all, tells only some . . . Mr. Sports, Mr. Action, Mr. Jim Ed Poole!" Then came Jim Ed's desperate attempts in his game reports to replace the word "defeated" with such synonyms as "exterminated," "ravaged," and "scourged."

Keith was a very funny man, but at times it was hard to tell whether his humor was intentional. "So much of his humor was in pauses," Connolly remembers, "the silences sometimes suggested confusion or cluelessness, but he was really setting you up for a punch line."

When Connelly wrote skits for the show, Keith consistently created rich characters and never let his co-host down. He always delivered. He excelled at building pictures in listeners' minds. "Sometimes it was just an inflection in his voice, a pause, or a sound of some sort," Connelly says. "That makes all the difference if people can imagine it. That's the difference between comedy that people can picture and just a collection of words."

Keith was a star on MPR's staff softball team, but he wasn't in love with being a radio star. Keillor, heard radio gold in Keith's improvisational and reading abilities, and tapped Keith's high-profile sound-making talents as a regular performer on *A Prairie Home Companion*. There he appeared as Larry, the basement resident of the World Theater; Maurice, Café Boeuf's maître d';



A man laments the end of Garrison Keillor's *Morning Show*, standing vigil across the street from the studio at Park Square Court where the show was produced.

and many other characters. Keith also provided all of the sound-effects for such recurring skits as “Lives of the Cowboys” and “Guy Noir.”

In 1983, MPR startled listeners by announcing the cancellation of *The Morning Show*, citing its eclecticism in an otherwise all-classical format. An unprecedented avalanche of letters and phone calls from fans saved the show, which continued for another two decades. In 2009, *The Morning Show* went off the air for good when Keith retired and Conelly moved to a new format at MPR.

Keith continued to do sound effects for *A Prairie Home Companion*, until his sudden death from a heart attack in 2011. His colleagues at MPR loved him as a kind, generous, and creative man who could make a joke, a funny one, out of anything. The MPR community paid tribute to Keith in a gathering at the Fitzgerald Theater that featured no laments or eulogies—only music, sound effects, and comedy of the kind that would keep him alive in the organization’s collective memory.

The Uplink Revolution

Since its inception, NPR had been the producer and distributor of the largest amount of the national programming available to public radio stations around the country. At the same time, many public radio stations noticed a shift in the emphasis of NPR's distributed programs. It was moving towards news and public affairs, and away from arts and cultural programming. Stations also sensed a growing resistance to independent program initiatives, as NPR increasingly declined outside program production.

The popularity of *A Prairie Home Companion* and the success of the satellite uplink/downlink equipment housed in the Saint Paul broadcast center emboldened Kling to conceive of a new entity that could complement NPR.

At a 1982 trade conference, Kling met with NPR head Frank Mankiewicz and proposed that NPR invite public radio stations to contribute more to the stream of programs provided to stations. He asked Mankiewicz if he would consider new programming ideas from stations when funds were available. Mankiewicz declined, prioritizing the use of resources towards making NPR a major news organization. When Kling countered with a specific request that NPR fund and distribute *A Prairie Home Companion* nationally, Mankiewicz again declined.

With characteristic initiative and determination, Kling quickly met with leaders of six major public radio stations gathered at the conference, including WNYC (New York), WGBH (Boston), KQED (San Francisco), KERA (Dallas), WGUC (Cincinnati), and KUSC (Los Angeles).

Kling proposed that the stations create a new entity that would find new

programming from independent producers and international broadcasters. This consortium would strive to make it easier for other broadcasters to produce, promote, schedule, and distribute new programming that did not originate in Washington, D.C.

“We made a mistake when we founded NPR. We gave it no incentive to look beyond its walls for new ideas” Kling told the group. A new entity “will have no internal production ability and will have to look outside its walls for all of its program content.”

The group immediately agreed to form American Public Radio (APR) and join him as the first members of its board. Later, the founders recruited additional board members from throughout the country, including Bill Dietel of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Jon Lovelace of The Capital Group, Marty Segal, Chair of Lincoln Center Ken Dayton of Dayton Hudson Corporation and a half dozen other business leaders. Kling was initially the chair and later the president of APR.

Not surprisingly, APR completely changed the chemistry of program production and distribution. As it built a list of more than 210 affiliate stations, Mankiewicz felt that APR was challenging, not complementing, NPR by competing for time on affiliate stations during a period of financial trouble. Continuation of NPR’s federal subsidies was in question and its expansion in news had began to outrun its revenues. He also questioned the viability of the consortium. “APR is exactly the length of Garrison Keillor’s larynx. Depending on how tired his throat gets, APR could be a blip in the history of public radio,” Mankiewicz said.

In contrast, Kling characterized APR as an entrepreneurial organization whose survival depended on the marketplace. Public radio stations were lining up to carry its programming, and that ended the debate as far as Kling was concerned.

Keillor’s throat held out, as did the talents of many other producers and



"The Choristers of King's College"

← REDUCE TO 81% →

The Choristers of King's College annually perform A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, a holiday tradition that is broadcast in America through MPR's special international relationships.

program creators. By the end of the 1980s, APR served millions of people listening to hundreds of affiliated stations across the country. APR programming included Los Angeles Philharmonic concerts and *A Prairie Home Companion*, as well as the *Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival*, *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*, broadcasts of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, *Baroque and Beyond*, and the *Spoletto Music Festival*. The program offerings later branched out to include the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) *As it Happens* and *Sunday Morning*, MPR's personal finance program *Sound Money*.

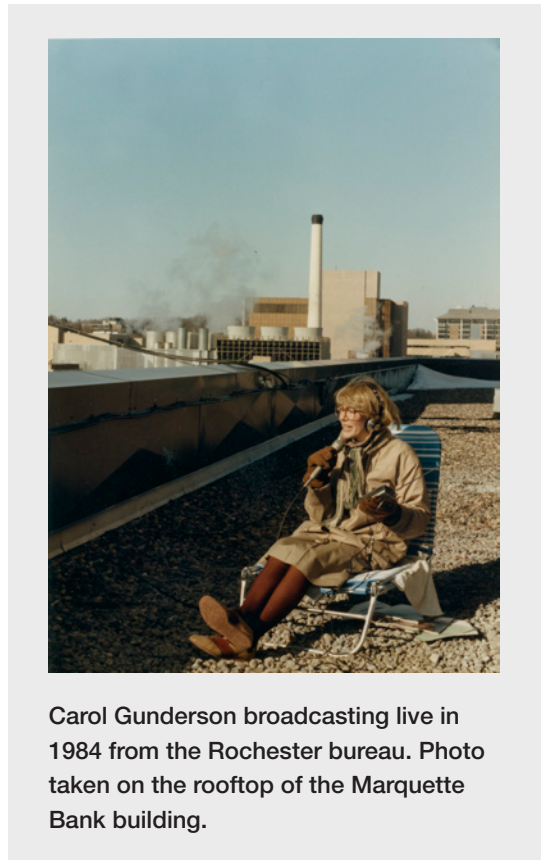
The organization later changed its name to Public Radio International (PRI), as part of a shift to include more news and public affairs programming. PRI, which for years distributed the popular and influential *This American Life*, continues to produce and distribute programs today, including *The World*, *Science Friday*, and *The Takeaway*.

Marshalling the Enterprises

The success of Rivertown Trading Company inspired MPR to launch other entrepreneurial ventures during the early 1980s. One of them, Minnesota News Network (MNN), provided a new take on an idea several commercial broadcasting organizations had previously tried and failed at.

Small commercial stations desperately needed dependable high-quality satellite distribution of news. MNN was designed to meet that need by delivering hourly news, farm, sports and weather reports to commercial stations throughout Minnesota. The service supported itself through subscriptions and advertising. The newscasts were distributed via MPR's satellite uplink to dishes at each subscribing commercial radio station, provided by MNN.

Initially, MNN used reporters and hosts from MPR's news staff to produce the newscasts, but later MNN built its own staff and operated from a separate location. Well-known commercial broadcaster Don Schiel was hired to manage



Carol Gunderson broadcasting live in 1984 from the Rochester bureau. Photo taken on the rooftop of the Marquette Bank building.

the network, and other MPR employees pitched in. In its early years, the fledgling network was able to attract top Minnesota talent including Tim Shears, Don Wohlenhaus, Rick Lewis, Jeff Smith, Don Scheil and James Rasmussen.

Only three stations had signed on when MNN launched, but the number grew after MPR news staffer Gary Eichten and other staff members made cold calls to potential subscribers. He spent hours on the phone with station managers, some of whom were suspicious that MPR was attempting to take over radio across the state. “I had to convince them that no, we were just regular people trying to do our mission and provide a good public service,” Eichten says.

In time, MNN won the distribution contract for Minnesota Twins broadcasts outside the Twin Cities. MNN grew profitable and its proceeds helped support MPR’s news operation before it was sold to public company Saga Communications in 2004.

In another entrepreneurial move, MPR joined forces with Continental Cablevision of Boston in a unique partnership to create a Saint Paul cable television franchise in 1983. MPR’s agreement with Continental awarded the public radio service a three percent share of the pre-tax profits. This joint effort lasted until 2012 when Comcast bought out MPR’s contract.

Similarly, MPR’s early vision to acquire special microwave frequencies from the FCC in the early 1980’s resulted in substantial financial support for MPR’s endowment when use of these frequencies was sold to Sprint for cellular telephone use several decades later.

Mainstreet Minnesota

Reaching out and engaging Minnesotans often fueled new ideas, including the innovative Mainstreet Radio, a special MPR reporting unit focused on greater Minnesota.

Dennis Hamilton, formerly director of network stations and then vice president of broadcasting at MPR, recalls how Mainstreet Radio seized Kling's attention. "I remember Bill calling me and saying, 'What's this about?' I explained that it was important for MPR to have an initiative aimed exclusively at telling the Greater Minnesota story more thoroughly, and to hire really good people to find and tell those stories."

The work produced by Mainstreet Radio inspired support from organizations such as Blandin Foundation, whose mission is to grow healthy and vibrant rural communities, a mission that was consistent with Father Colman and Bill Kling's earliest vision for what would become MPR.

The Mainstreet team included Leif Enger, John Biewen, and Rachel Raebe, three of the most talented storytellers then working in public radio. The trio was based in a small studio in Brainerd, and equipped with a remote truck. "Their job was to gather and tell stories making life in rural Minnesota alive for listeners," Hamilton says. Traveling around Minnesota, they brought the stories of everyday people to the air and exposed the joys and trials experienced while living everyday lives.

The team quickly won several awards for series that investigated race relations in Bemidji and rural education, among other topics. Their stories highlighted what was remarkable and challenging about rural life, like the



Leif Enger, Rachel Raebe, and John Biewen of Mainstreet Radio pose with their mobile radio studio in front of a grain elevator.

future of mining, the complexity of agriculture and how people define their sense of place.

Engineer Cliff Bentley traveled to work on many Mainstreet stories, and learned that simply letting things happen could result in wonderful stories. He remembers one story broadcast from International Falls that required the crew to set up at a livestock inspection stall. As they recorded interviews and sent them by satellite uplink to the Twin Cities, a train rolled by. “Even though we were in close for the interviews, the train was really loud. Listening to it later, I heard a really nice mix—with the train going from one end of the location to the other. It didn’t overpower what we did, and it helped make the mix sound really nice.”

Mainstreet covered stories for more than fifteen years, ensuring that listeners heard and appreciated the rural experience in Minnesota. Its run inspired the approach MPR still takes in covering the entire state, going in-depth on issues of importance to the whole region. Today, reporters are based in MPR network offices around the state and are embedded in their communities, ensuring that rural and small town issues get coverage right alongside the news out of the capital city.

Broadcasting the Region

MPR invested in the Upper Midwest in another important way through its frequent broadcasts of regional music groups. Staff at MPR stations in Greater Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and Michigan produced and broadcast recordings of regional artists and orchestras, making MPR unique among public radio organizations in the sheer number of live recordings it aired.

MPR also developed close ties with the Dale Warland Singers, VocalEssence, the Concordia College Choir, and other regional choral ensembles. Many groups, including orchestras in Fargo-Moorhead, Duluth, Saint Cloud, and Rochester gained wide exposure from these broadcasts.

MPR's distribution of the live concert broadcasts of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Minnesota Orchestra through American Public Radio gave both groups a large national audience. Orchestral music became one of Minnesota's most important cultural exports. By the early 1980s, more than 100 public radio stations carried the Minnesota Orchestra series, many of them





WSCD news director Jim Neumann and general manager Dan Schmidt with the Duluth staff, 1988.

Back Row: reporter/producer Joe Kelly, membership coordinator Barb Johnson, development coordinator Carol Ann Howe, & director of operations Janet Carter

Middle: part-time receptionist Laura Jaap & part-time secretary Janet Rogers

Bottom: part-time receptionist Linda Bard

airing the program live.

Don Manildi, one of the orchestral program hosts during this period, prided himself on being prepared for anything unexpected that could possibly bewitch a live broadcast. This skill proved important when the Minnesota Orchestra invited Swedish royalty to a special Scandinavia Today concert in 1982. The King and Queen had not yet arrived by the scheduled start time. Although the concert was delayed, the broadcast had to start on time. How could Manildi fill the minutes? He began by giving an unusually detailed commentary on the music and performers. The King and Queen still failed to appear, so he plunged into a long description of the whole multi-day Scandinavia Today observance.

He was about to give a biography of the architect of Orchestra Hall when, fifteen minutes late, the royals at last arrived. “I don’t know what I would have said next,” Manildi confessed. “Maybe a description of what I was wearing.”

Such irregularities have been rare. Manildi’s ability to put the listener in the concert hall are legendary. Brian Newhouse, who joined MPR in 1983 and has hosted the Orchestra broadcasts since the 1990s, well recalls what Manildi’s presence was like when things went right. “I remember sitting at a stoplight in the middle of Dekalb, Illinois, on an incredibly cold night in January 1981 or 1982. The wind was blowing so hard that my little car was shaking,” Newhouse says. “So I sat at that light, and Don was describing the mood in the hall that night. I felt like I was living this performance at the same moment he was, even though he was 350 miles away. Somebody in Tulsa was probably sitting on their porch with a glass of lemonade, listening to the same thing, and someone else was probably listening as they shoveled snow in Fairbanks. I had this immediate feeling of gratitude to the host who was sewing us all together.”

Programs such as *Live from Landmark*, led by Development Director Gloria Sewell and broadcast before an audience at Landmark Center in downtown Saint Paul, *Lund’s Presents*, featuring artists from across the region, and *Artists in Concert* all showed MPR’s commitment to chamber musicians and to bringing arts and culture to listeners. One of the great finds of *Live from Landmark* was the performing Kosower family, made up of the dad, Paul, and his two children, Paula and Mark, who played cello together as the Dolce Trio and composed new works. Listeners loved them. Mark went on to become principal cello with the Cleveland Orchestra.

MPR’s broadcasts of concerts from the Minnesota Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and regional orchestras from across the Upper Midwest touched audiences near and far. “We and our audiences were the beneficiaries, and our partners around the world benefited,” says Newhouse.

MPR’s coverage of regional musical events is closely connected to its

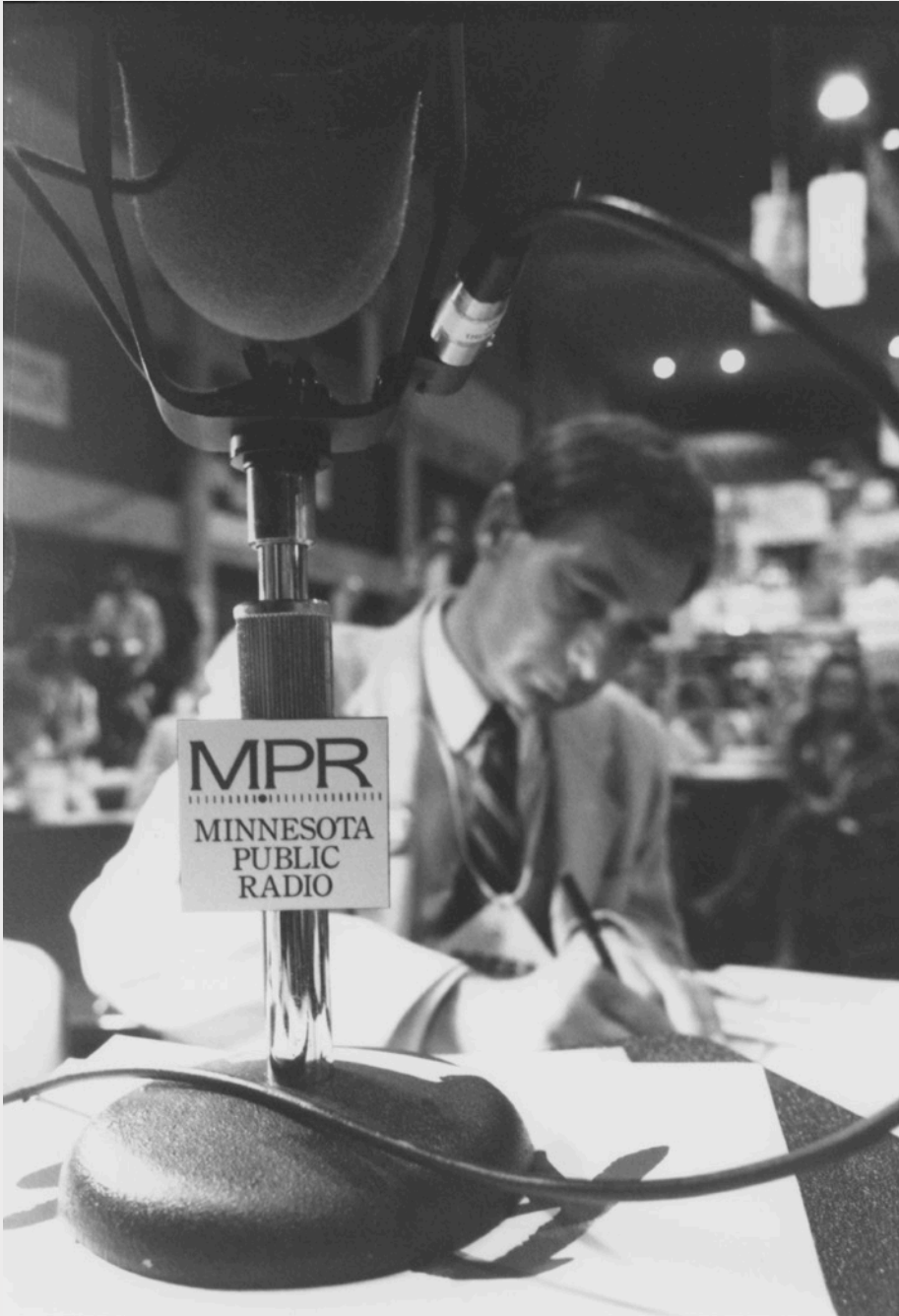
educational mission. “We believe every child deserves a music education,” says Newhouse, in summing up the organization’s approach to education that goes back many decades. “It’s for the child, it’s for the community, and that’s why we do it.”

Increasingly through the 1980s, public school systems were cutting funding for music education, which left the door open for MPR to provide music education in new formats. Hearing a broadcast of a regional group would give kids encouragement that they too could make music, and developing a love of music and musicianship could take children in many directions.

MPR partnered with the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA) in some of its first educational initiatives, and began broadcasting concerts by high achieving student musicians. “It set me on a path of spending one really special Saturday each year at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis to record the MMEA All-State Concert,” remembers MPR host Mindy Ratner. “We’d interview kids from all over the state. Over the years, the music-making got better and the response from kids became more nuanced and sophisticated.”



Jeff Walker, Sara Meyer, and Kate Moos at the 1988 State Democratic Convention.



Gary Eichten at the 1988 State Democratic Convention.

Essay by

Dale Warland

Many artists can, with the benefit of hindsight, point to a stroke of unanticipated good fortune that helped shape the trajectory of their subsequent work. In my career as a choral conductor, it was Minnesota Public Radio that took this role—not merely on a short-term basis, but over a period of decades, becoming an abiding force in the artistic development of the Dale Warland Singers (DWS) and affording regular exposure to a broad and discerning audience that extended far beyond Minnesota’s borders.

Without MPR’s championship, without its enduring recognition of the power and potential of the choral art, the reach and impact of our work would have been dramatically curtailed. For the extraordinary opportunities MPR has afforded me and my colleagues—opportunities that together fostered a sustained sense of excitement and expansiveness—I am inexpressibly grateful.

Born and raised on a farm in northwest Iowa, I decided, at some point during my high school years, to pursue a career as a radio announcer. This youthful ambition would soon be displaced by another, but it never quite disappeared. So when, in 1967, after brief stints in California and Upstate New York, I moved with my family to Minnesota, to take up a position at Macalester College in

Saint Paul, I was predisposed to establish fruitful relations with MPR.

Hence it was no great surprise that, shortly after settling in at Macalester, I drove to Collegeville, MPR's first home. There, the indefatigable Michael Barone graciously allowed me to dig through the station's already-sizable accumulation of recordings (LPs, in those days), widening my knowledge of the choral repertoire (a permanent project for every serious conductor) while suggesting concepts and models for my own program-making. In this way, MPR became an integral part of my ongoing musical self-education; it remains so to this day.

But that formulation scarcely hints at the extent of our involvement. From its earliest days, MPR featured "live" choral performances in its broadcast schedule. It was these broadcasts that ultimately put the DWS "on the map," nationally as well as locally, and enabled us to join with distinguished choirs from around our state in making Minnesota synonymous with choral excellence in the U.S. The cumulative impact of these programs has been profound. ("Impact" comes in many forms: the DWS incubated at least three marriages among its singers!)

Over the years, MPR offered the DWS scores of invitations and opportunities—openings that invariably proved stimulating for the choir's artistic development and for my own. We participated in the inaugural edition (1981) of the syndicated chamber-music series now known as "Saint Paul Sunday": an all-Bach program with The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. This was followed by no fewer than twelve DWS solo productions for "Saint Paul Sunday," hosted

by Bill McGlaughlin. There were, in addition, annual national broadcasts in the popular “Echoes of Christmas” series; countless subscription concerts, broadcast regionally; and appearances with Garrison Keillor on “A Prairie Home Companion” (either by the full complement of 40 voices or, more compactly, by the 16-voice “Dale Warland Family Singers”—an appellation bestowed on the fly by Garrison himself); and, sprinkled over some 30 years, programs specially created for radio, produced and hosted by Brian Newhouse.

A small deluge of letters and telephone calls—“social media,” for better or worse, did not yet exist—from across the U.S. generally followed these broadcasts. From these thoughtful and usually complimentary communications I discovered, *inter alia*, that most radio listeners were likely to encounter us, not in the comfort of their living room, but rather in the front seat of their car or at their kitchen table. (I learned to program accordingly.) I recall a most enthusiastic note from composer Morten Lauridsen, who, after hearing the DWS perform his marvelous “O Magnum Mysterium” (broadcast from the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis) while stopped in the parking lot of his bank in Los Angeles, rhapsodized over our performance and hoped that we might someday record the work—a request we were happy to fulfill. Jerold Ottley, then music director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, also recounted an epiphany in his car: he pulled off the road in Salt Lake City to hear the last minutes of the DWS’s “Echoes of Christmas,” broadcast nationally.

The list goes on. I myself have been the victim of such

“unsafe-at-any-speed” moments: there is nothing quite like the experience of flipping on the car radio and hearing, unexpectedly but unmistakably, the sound of one’s own choir!

Few radio stations, domestic or foreign, have approached MPR’s investment of time and money—to say nothing of the sheer labor of it all—in producing and broadcasting “live” choral performances. This unswerving commitment to a widely neglected genre, sustained over decades, has been the greatest imaginable gift to all of us who treasure the choral art. We can only hope that, in its second half-century, MPR will remain a beacon, enriching and deepening its choral programming, and infusing new energy and ardor into the inexhaustible choral adventure.

The King of Instruments

Meanwhile, several MPR-created music programs were in ascent. One was *Pipedreams*, conceived, produced, and hosted by the system's Music Director, Michael Barone. Though a self-confessed "classical music omnivore" interested in all sorts of music, Barone is himself an organist who served for eleven years at First United Methodist Church in Saint Cloud.

In 1970, Barone initiated a weekly organ-music hour on MPR Sunday nights, titled *The Organ Program*. In the summer of 1980, when the American Guild of Organists held its biennial convention in the Twin Cities, Barone seized the opportunity to record a week's worth of events, some of which were broadcast live locally. The resulting stack of concert tapes proved to be "good enough for prime time," he says, worthy of audiences beyond Minnesota.

Because the satellite uplink system had done away with the inefficiencies of program distribution via mailed analog recordings, Barone suggested to Program Director Nick Nash that MPR package a limited national syndication of 13 weeks of a new organ program that could go out to subscribing stations via the satellite. Barone envisioned a show that included interviews with organists and composers as well as concert recordings, and it took some time before he was able to record the relevant conversations.

Nash agreed, found sponsors in his sister-and brother-in-law, Lucinda and Wesley C. Dudley, and came up with the *Pipedreams* program title. Pleased with the results, the Dudleys continued the sponsorship throughout the extended *Pipedreams* run.

Pipedreams made its debut in January 1982 and about 70 public radio

stations subscribed to that limited first season. Though there was no intent at that time to do more, Barone's involvement at the subsequent biennial American Guild of Organists convention in Washington, DC, later that year gave the impetus to imagine a continuous presence on the airwaves. *Pipedreams* returned to national syndication in October 1983 and has been in production ever since, engaging audiences through travel tours, organ crawls, live performance events, and other community activities for listeners who appreciate “the king of instruments,” activities now shared with audiences around the world.

Big Moves

By the mid 1980s, *A Prairie Home Companion* was achieving legendary success. More than 325 public radio stations broadcast the program to nearly 5 million listeners in the U.S. and many more in Canada and Australia. In 1985, Keillor hit the cover of *Time* magazine. Not long after, Kling began shuttling to Los Angeles to craft a deal with Michael Eisner and John Cooke, head of cable TV's Disney Channel. After months of talks, they announced the production of 17 live televised *A Prairie Home Companion* programs for broadcast in 1987.

Behind all the program's successes, Kling could see that Keillor was on the verge of burnout. In the fall of 1986, Keillor told Kling he wanted to end the show, and Kling asked him to hold that decision for six months and then re-think it. Keillor reluctantly agreed and when February arrived, Kling made yet another attempt to explain why he thought it was a mistake to end the show.

Keillor was ready for a change; his audience wasn't. They never expected the show's creator and host to leave. But in his show on February 14, 1987, the 44-year-old Keillor delivered an ad for Powdermilk Biscuits, wiped his glasses with a handkerchief, and told a hushed World Theater audience and the radio listeners that after thirteen years and about 500 broadcasts of *A Prairie Home Companion*, he was taking leave of radio; his final show would come four months later. He said he was moving with his family to Denmark. He wanted to be a full-time literary writer again.

His "farewell" show from the World Theater drew representatives of 125 newspapers, *Time*, *Newsweek*, CNN, Disney and more. It lasted its regular two hours but, spurred by a six minute standing ovation, Keillor continued on

Keillor *Time* cover

while his producer took on the herculean task of keeping the satellite time from running out and alerting the Disney Channel production team that the end was not in sight. As the King Kamehameha choir waltzed along the stage, placing leis on the full stage of performers while the audience continued to stand in tribute, Keillor sang every farewell song he could think of ending with “Good Night Irene”. Finally, 40 minutes later, the curtain came down.

MPR worked quickly to find a replacement program that could be broadcast before a live audience. That show, *Good Evening*, featured host and Kentucky



Garrison Keillor and producer Margaret Moos confer during a rehearsal of *APHC* at the Fitzgerald Theater. (February 1987)

native Noah Adams, a voice long familiar to public radio audiences through his many years as co-host of NPR's *All Things Considered*. Quiet, confident, averse to small talk, and reserved, he evoked a small-college English professor with a potent, dry sense of humor.

Adams initially described *Good Evening's* format as a blend of music and literature, a homey gathering of people. Guests on the premiere show in January 1988 included Minnesota post-punk band the Wallets and Minnesota Twins organist Ronnie Newman. Adams developed a series of monologues titled "Saint Croix Notes," about nature and other doings in the Saint Croix River Valley where he lived, and he read aloud from the novels and short stories of other writers.

The times had changed, though, since *A Prairie Home Companion* first sought a national audience in 1980. Expectations were higher, and public radio stations subscribing to American Public Radio programs had a much greater variety of shows to choose from. The number of stations around the country

subscribing to *Good Evening* never went up much from the initial 150.

In the fall of 1988, after *Good Evening* had been on the air for only eleven months, Adams said he was leaving the show. He moved back to Washington, D.C., published a book of essays about his life on the Saint Croix, and resumed co-hosting *All Things Considered*.

Meanwhile, Keillor enjoyed his anonymity in Denmark for only a short time before he realized that his personality wasn't ideally suited to either Denmark or Danish. He and Kling continued to talk about radio, including a series of messages exchanged on an early version of email correspondence. Often sent from his lake cottage, Kling describing the loons calling, the warm Minnesota summer days, and anything else that might make Keillor homesick. Keillor did return to the US, but he wanted to live in New York City.

Meeting in New York, the two MPR pioneers walked along 6th Avenue talking about a possible new radio show and looked up to see Radio City Music Hall, the perfect venue for what Keillor described as a "Second Annual Farewell Show." The resulting show filled the 6,000-seat hall for three shows in a single weekend and generated another Disney television contract. It featured the Everly Brothers and Chet Atkins as musical guests, and included a 1957 Chevy convertible that rose up through the floor of the stage and rotated on the circular platter of the second stage level. The success of that new "farewell" show encouraged Kling and Keillor to find a way to return the show to regular weekly broadcasts. Keillor began slowly, hosting a series of *A Prairie Home Companion* live "farewell" concerts and spinoffs. But He had not forgotten the potential and thrill of weekly live radio; he continued to plan a comeback—which aired until his retirement in 2015.

This creative programming explosion put MPR on the map, setting new standards for content that few other public radio stations were achieving. Part of the success hinged on the trial and error development philosophy which had been part of MPR from its beginning. Errors weren't errors so much as

building blocks for better ideas. The freedom for creative minds to experiment and adapt led to the unprecedented programming that was becoming a MPR hallmark. It was also the foundation for more to come.

CHAPTER 3



A Truly Public Radio

By 1990, the story of Minnesota Public Radio had become a part of the fabric of Minnesota.

MPR had become an essential component of the area's cultural, artistic, and informational life. It largely achieved the mission that Father Colman Barry and Bill Kling had dreamed up a quarter century before.

MPR stations and translator facilities, which relay a station's signal to a distant area, blanketed the region across Minnesota into Michigan, Wisconsin, and South Dakota. From the Twin Cities to Bemidji, Fergus Falls, Houghton, Duluth, Decorah, Moorhead, Rochester, Sioux Falls, Worthington, Appleton, Brainerd, Cloquet, Saint Peter, Thief River Falls, Virginia/Hibbing, and Collegeville, MPR programming was heard across the region.

Championed by employees, members, and advocates, MPR's events, partnerships, broadcast concerts, copies of *Minnesota Monthly* magazine, bumper stickers, and news coverage of local people and places were seen and heard all across the upper Midwest.

The 1990s could have been a time of taking a break, resting on laurels, and continuing to do what the organization already did so well. Instead, MPR evolved along with its communities, grew in unexpected ways, and planned new strategies to meet new needs just as it had since the 1960s. That's the story of MPR that unfolded during this era.

Essay by

Dennis Hamilton

Some years ago, there was a café in a loft in a downtown Bemidji hardware store. Yes, a hardware store café. One day while having a scratch made lunch there, I overheard two women discussing what they had heard on MPR's Midday program. They had met serendipitously at that place and soon were having a lively discussion about what they had heard on the radio. There, in the plumbing aisle, I overheard, once again, how MPR reached into communities.

I have always been taken by the intermingling of vision and action in MPR's history. And as one who was charged with leading a lot of MPR's station expansion, that mix was critical. The leadership and governance of MPR was always focused on quality and distribution. First, make the best radio possible, and then get it to every corner of Minnesota and beyond. The getting it to every corner part required a convergence of mission and people in communities who created the momentum for expansion.

That happened, in large part, because people began to ask how they could get MPR in their communities. That required MPR management and board to invent the formulae and steps to answer their questions and, more importantly, give them specific guidance

and encouragement to be part of the solution.

Those people as much as those of us who worked at MPR were pioneers who coalesced interest in their communities, organized meetings, supported grant requests, recruited local business and government support and in many cases helped find land for towers, and space for studios. They created momentum, stayed the course and built communities of listeners, participants in programs, identifiers of the unique and special aspects of their “place(s)” and are loyal supporters and boosters.

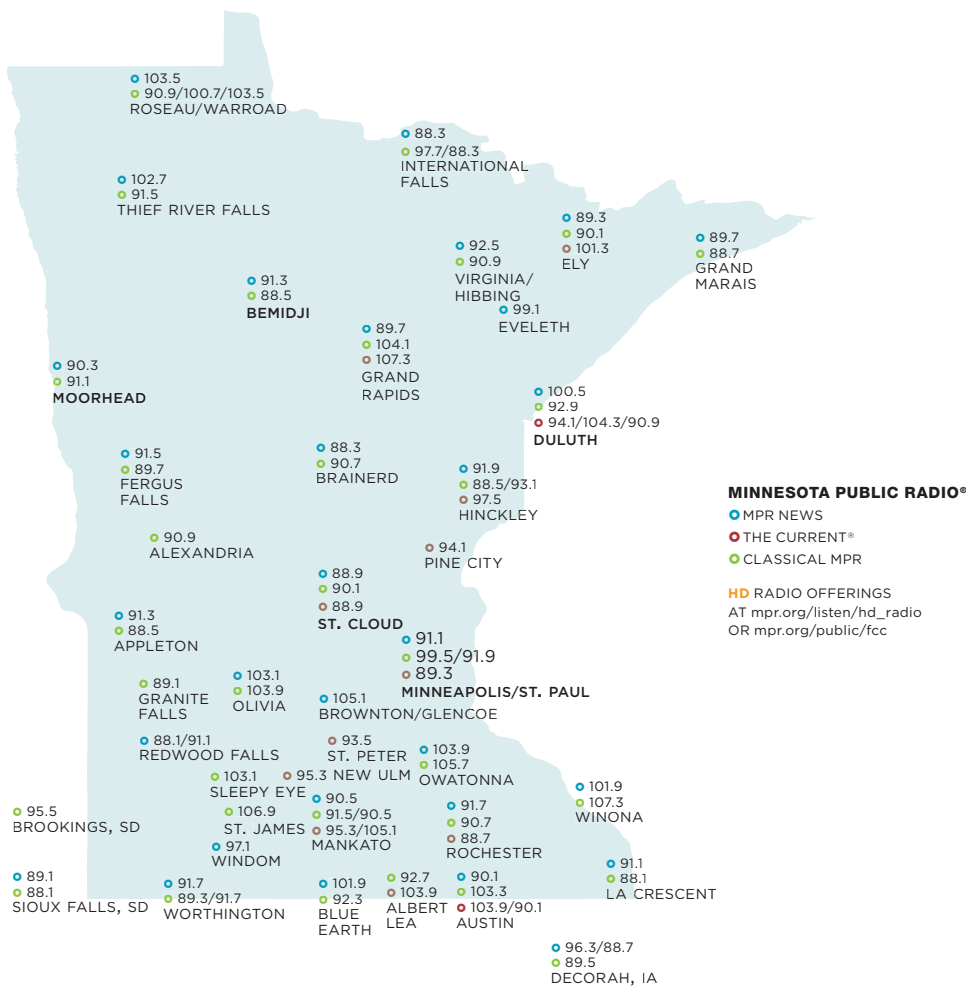
I have fond memories of meetings in living rooms, library meeting rooms, church basements, college administration offices, local government offices and wherever we needed to gather to put the building blocks together to get MPR transmitted throughout Minnesota.

In the end, the germ of an idea created by the pioneers and innovators in the Collegeville crucible, became a mission that enabled people across our State to play critical roles in what is now the MPR networks.

I thank you for your dedication, friendship, enthusiasm, partnership, and financial support in making Minnesota a more cohesive place through the institution you created for yourselves, your neighbors, people like you all over the nation, and generations to come.

Find your place on the map below and give yourself a pat on the back. You are MPR pioneers.

CHAPTER 3 Signal Strength



Dennis Hamilton worked for MPR for 25 years, including as Vice President, before being selected as a Bush Foundation Fellow and then attending Harvard's Kennedy School. While at MPR, Hamilton was responsible for building, leading, staffing and programming many of the MPR network stations across the state, and he helped to create and implement MPR's dual-service strategy (providing both full-time news and full-time music services to listeners).

Live from New York

For two years, fans of *A Prairie Home Companion* eagerly awaited Garrison Keillor's return to live radio. In November 1989, feeling the insufficiency of solitude and writing just for the printed page, Keillor and MPR launched a new weekly program. *The American Radio Company of the Air* was produced by MPR and broadcast from the host's new home base in New York City. Right off the bat, 250 American Public Radio stations signed on to carry it.

Aired from the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Lamb's Theater in Manhattan, the new *The American Radio Company of the Air* show regularly featured the talents of Rob Fisher and the Coffee Club Orchestra and the Broadway Local Theater Company (named for a subway line), which included *Prairie Home* favorites Sue Scott and Tom Keith. Pete Seeger, Maureen McGovern, Tito Puente, Marilyn Horne, and Eileen Farrell, among many others, took the stage as guests.

Listeners quickly noticed that the New York-centric *The American Radio Company of the Air* show sounded a lot like *A Prairie Home Companion*. Keillor was having trouble getting Minnesota out of his mind. He admitted that he felt homesick for his home state because it was where "everybody I care about lives."

After a touring broadcast of *American Radio Company* performed at the World Theater in Saint Paul, Keillor admitted that he almost made some slips of the tongue. "After singing the first verse of the theme song, when I'd come to the place where I say, 'Hello, everybody, welcome to ...,' the name *A Prairie Home Companion* would be on my lips. And I really wanted to say it,"

Keillor remembers.

He gave in to that temptation after he permanently moved *American Radio Company* to the World Theater in 1992. A series of contracts between Keillor and MPR addressed ownership of the live show, the recording, broadcast and distribution rights to the radio program, and other business matters.

More than 270 public radio stations signed on to carry the beloved show, and a year later, the familiar *A Prairie Home Companion* name was back. The program reached emotional and artistic peaks in the years that followed. Keillor took artistic risks, and his small staff figured out how to make reality out of his big visions.

“One of the things about Garrison is that he was fearless—he wasn’t just concerned with doing another show,” says Sam Hudson, an audio engineer and technical producer for the show. “That wasn’t good enough. It was about trying to make the show better or doing something we hadn’t done before. People would say, ‘You can’t do it that way,’ and we’d go ahead and figure it out and do it.”

Keillor often told the staff that adding uncertainty and adrenaline to a live show was like being shot out of a cannon. He always wanted the show to give audiences a glimpse of something they couldn’t get anywhere else.

More than even during the shows of the 1980s, the second incarnation of *A Prairie Home Companion* attracted musicians and other performers who simply wanted an association with the program. A group of well-known celebrities, including Chet Atkins, Emmy Lou Harris, Brad Paisley, Martin Sheen, and John Lithgow, called the producers and asked to be part of the broadcast. Some grew close to Keillor and the crew.

“We could have had A-list celebrities all the time,” says Kate Gustafson Sanderson, the show’s managing director. “But that wasn’t important to Garrison. He just wanted it to be a good show.” The show also introduced many emerging artists and offered a national spotlight to others who were

still gaining a foothold, foreshadowing what MPR's *The Current* would do later for a new generation of emerging artists.

The *A Prairie Home Companion* show traveled all over the country, but home shows remained special. Staff members who worked the merchandise booth in the lobby of the World Theater listened as they sold t-shirts and collections of Lake Wobegon monologues. They heard how far people traveled to attend the show, and how important it was for them to be there. The Saint Paul audience was more reserved than the folks in the seats in Brooklyn, but they were just as passionate about the parts of the show they loved. They formed the core of the *APHC* fans who would go on program-themed cruises and take part in other events in the years to come.

In 1994, at Keillor's suggestion, MPR renamed the World Theater the Fitzgerald Theater to honor Saint Paul's most notable literary figure, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Keillor hosted the renaming ceremony, which included the splashing the building with water from the Mississippi River and White Bear Lake as a christening.



The Fitzgerald Theater

Essay by

Jearlyn Steele

Singing on A Prairie Home Companion has changed me. Nowadays, I sing along to folk music and try to yodel while driving. Not pretty, but what a joy. I have sung duets with Carol King and Elvis Costello, and sat in dressing rooms with Meryl Streep and Lily Tomlin. I am still in awe of it all. Yet, there are several special moments that helped me know how much Garrison Keillor and the show has brought to my life. This essay will share reflections of my growth in gifts, guidance and faith.

My Gift, My Voice

Growing up, church was my life. I went every day of the week except Monday; that was my Sabbath. I sang in the Sunshine Band, the Teen Choir and the Adult Choir. My voice would often take a beating from all the singing, but high school music theory classes, and singing in the Madrigal's helped me learn how to manage my gift. Like the choirs of my youth, A Prairie Home Companion presented avenues for me to discover new parts and sounds of my voice. I sang in various languages including Hebrew, Italian and Norwegian. I have no clue what the songs were about, but I sang them nonetheless. When participating in The Lives of the Cowboys skit, I learned how to make loud, guttural spitting sounds, which

overworked my diaphragm and made it stronger. My acting skills were tested and tried, demanding clear diction, something I do not practice every day. Trying my hand at character acting was a trip! Sue Scott was my go-to for advice and encouragement. Her smile always seemed to arrest my fears. Sometimes I failed, but no one, not one cast member, ever let me think I was less than, and I am grateful for that.

Guidance

While living in Los Angeles, my son was in flux all the time it seemed. He is smart and handsome, but at the time he was also broke. My purse string was stretched to no end, but with love and patience I helped in any way I could. He was worth it. While the band took a break one day, I walked over and spilled my concerns to Garrison. To my surprise he listened attentively as if no one else was in the room. Finally, I popped the question, “Do children ever get out of our pockets?” He smiled, put his hand firmly on my shoulder and offered a definitive, “No.” In that moment his no managed to confirm what I already knew: No, our children never leave our pockets nor our hearts nor our prayers. Today, my son is standing on his own and yes, he graduated from college and is working in the entertainment industry.

I always knew I would grow as a singer while on A Prairie Home Companion, but I never knew that the singers, actors, musicians, and the cast would become my extended family offering guidance from time to time.

Faith

Garrison and I came from singing families. Although our

denominations were vastly different, Lutheran and Pentecostal, we found common ground within the solace of the hymns. There is A Balm in Gilead, This Little Light of Mine and Amazing Grace were three favorites. It was more than singing. It was a meeting of our voices offering up love songs to our creator. Often he would suggest a hymn unfamiliar to me but after learning it, I fell in love and immediately added it to my repertoire. O Love, Thou Will Not Let Me Go was one of them. I remember it well. After rehearsing it with Garrison and the Shoe Band, I went to find a quiet place to cry through a burden I had been carrying for days. It's this unexpected grace—moments that help us release the pain of the world outside—that A Prairie Home Companion can offer. I grew in faith through the words of unknown melodies; they delivered much needed balm to a church girl who didn't know she needed it.

As a black woman who knew little of the white experience, I at first didn't expect to find peace and clarity within the lore of Lake Wobegon, but often did. From time to time, fans of the show remind me there are black people in Lake Wobegon too. We sing and offer prayers to the same God, receiving the same grace and mercy, and we share our gifts, guidance and faith, through songs, stories, and the News from Lake Wobegon.

Two Channels for Two Cities

Although fans all over the continent could hear *A Prairie Home Companion*, Twin Cities listeners on MPR's news station KNOW-AM were hampered by the limits of the AM signal. The station's meager 5,000-watt signal couldn't always penetrate concrete office buildings or reach the western suburbs of Minneapolis. Somehow the station had to move to the FM band and its clearer and more powerful signals.

Finding a second Twin Cities FM channel became a MPR board priority. Unfortunately, no noncommercial FM stations were available for sale, and commercial stations were thought to be too expensive to acquire. The MPR Board's Planning Committee, led by John Rollwagen, the Chair and CEO of Cray Research, disagreed and challenged Kling to look for a commercial FM station.

Kling estimated the cost of obtaining a commercial FM station to be somewhere between \$25 and \$40 million. Thinking big, Rollwagen pushed back and suggested that in the long run, that price might be "cheap" for the service it could provide.

Encouraged by the Planning Committee, Kling began negotiations with Roy Park, owner of two commercial FM stations in Minneapolis. Park lived in Ithaca, New York, and had never sold a station he owned. After some long conversations and visits to his offices, Park was persuaded to consider the idea.

At the same time, as word traveled that MPR was looking, Kling got a call from Morgan Stanley, the finance firm which held the bonds for Twin Cities rock station WLOL-FM, 99.5. The station was no longer connected with the former WLOL-AM frequency that MPR had purchased for its news channel

years before. Morgan Stanley was calling the bonds, demanding an immediate payment of debt, which dropped the station's price. Morgan Stanley asked the perfect question: Would MPR make an offer?

MPR responded with a lowball offer and there was no immediate response. But Morgan Stanley eventually called back, accepting the offer; it was less than half the price of the lowest figure for an FM frequency that the market would have supported at the time. The purchase was negotiated at \$12 million. MPR requested \$12 million in tax-exempt bonds from the Saint Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority to finance the purchase.

Both the purchase and financing were controversial. Using tax-exempt bonds provided valuable assistance for an important Saint Paul employer and non-profit institution, and allowed MPR to make use of a special non-profit interest rate in the financing. Some commercial broadcasters said that the public financing gave MPR an unfair advantage in the marketplace. MPR countered that this form of financing was little different from industrial revenue bonds providing tax-exempt financing for commercial projects intended to achieve public purposes.

In the end, the bonds were issued, the sale was successful, and MPR repaid the debt with interest, principally from royalties and earnings generated by the operations of Rivertown Trading Company.

When the dust settled, Classical KSJN moved from 91.1 FM to 99.5 FM, KNOW-AM leapt across the band barrier to take the 91.1 FM frequency, and the reception problems of MPR News were behind them. The new 100,000-watt KNOW-FM could send its signal well beyond the most remote edges of the metropolitan area. Expanding MPR's signal reach meant more listeners, more members, and more support for the news service.

Just as important, KNOW's expanded broadcast area made MPR more prominent and respected as a news provider. Newsmakers grew more willing to talk to MPR's reporters, policymakers began citing MPR's coverage, listeners

around the region became familiar with its commitment to covering regional public affairs and politics, and many people began relying on MPR as their main source of information, one that played the news straight ahead, informing and educating the expanding audience.

Tom Kigin called this movement of stations and shifting of frequencies the most important strategic move in the organization's history. It allowed MPR to build a solid two-channel network in the Twin Cities.

A Fixture at the State Fair

At a MPR staff meeting in the 1980s, Kling concluded by asking, “Anything else?” Vice President of Programming Nick Nash broke the silence. He suggested that MPR somehow gain a presence at that annual hothouse of regional culture, pride, and zaniness, the Minnesota State Fair. How could it hurt to get in front of 150,000 people a day?

His colleagues weren’t enthusiastic. “I had my head taken off and handed to me, and I tucked it under my left arm and went back to my office thinking, ‘Well, that’s it,’” Nash remembers thinking.

It took several years of internal discussion, but in 1991 MPR finally got its State Fair booth, including the 99.5 FM frequency and equipment that MPR gained in the purchase of WLOL. Previously known for WLOL’s eardrum-shattering presence, fairgoers immediately noticed a welcomed drop in volume when MPR moved into the booth at the corner of Judson and Nelson on the fairgrounds. On opening day, news reporter Dan Olson was out front of the MPR booth sweeping up litter. “You have your deep-fried peaches, your corn on the cob, your corn dog, your country rock,” Olson said to passing fairgoers. “Now you got your classical.”

As the 1990s unfolded, MPR’s State Fair booth featured more than just classical music. There were live broadcasts of *The Morning Show*, sing-alongs, panel discussions on Fair food, book signings by MPR authors, a musical tribute to famed racehorse Dan Patch, and performances by musicians of all sorts, sometimes with the roar of go carts in the background.

The crowds devoured debates and forums involving politicians and



MPR station manager retreat at the Fawcett House, ca. 1992.
Dennis Hamilton, Jill Burkland, John Gaddo, John Snee,
Jon McTaggart, Lois Hanson, Rich Dietman, Valerie Arganbright

candidates that MPR broadcast from the Fair. During one conversation between U.S. Senators Dave Durenberger and Paul Wellstone, Durenberger appeared in a charcoal gray suit and a solidly senatorial look, while Wellstone wore a rumpled maroon t-shirt. As their discussion began, audience members delighted in the visual representation of Minnesota politics.

One year, Garrison Keillor said he'd host a noon hour broadcast from the Fair. He wanted to do a poetry show, and he wanted the audience to provide the poetry. At twelve o'clock he took the stage and asked people to come up from the crowd to recite. People of all ages came forward. They had memorized pages of Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson, some of them seeming the least likely of people to love poetry. Keillor bantered with them, listened to their poetry, and made an hour-long show of it.

MPR hosts revel in the fairtime experience of presenting their shows before a live audience that was chomping on pronto pups, swatting at flies, and



Garrison Keillor “Do You Know Minnesota?” Quiz Minnesota State Fair August 23, 1996.

sweating a river. Longtime host Gary Eichten once distributed Princess Kay of the Milky Way trading cards to the crowd. Classical MPR presented concerts on the small stage, bringing brass quintets and wind ensembles to the street scene, along with performances by some of the region’s best-known choirs.

The Ascent of *Midday*

In the fall of 1992, Gary Eichten thought MPR had demoted him. He was asked to change roles in the news department, from hosting the regional late-afternoon edition of *All Things Considered* to hosting *Midday*, a program straddling the lunch hour that featured interviews with newsmakers. However, to many audience members, that move was when Eichten became the voice of MPR.

In his new role at *Midday*, Eichten personified the art of hosting, a tradition begun by the program's previous host, Bob Potter. They both asked hard, insightful questions; the very questions their audience most wanted answered. Eichten let his guests answer those questions, and really wanted to understand their responses. He became an icon, in a way that he never could have if he'd stayed the anchor of *All Things Considered*.

Eichten's on-air style was remarkably like his off-air personality: direct, neighborly, and colored by his Mankato origins. Although never antagonistic or confrontational, he would prod an evasive interviewee with a gentle Midwestern skepticism that encouraged responses. He drew out and built the trust of thousands of people on the program, from governors and senators to meteorologists and authors. All done while almost never uttering the word "I."

His rules for himself in any interview were to "shut your mouth and be pleasant. There's no reason to batter away and be mean to people or to be hostile. You can always get more information from people if you're nice to them."

Eichten was so intent on remaining politically neutral that he would not drive the family car if any political bumper stickers or decals belonging to his wife, Joann, were visible. One of the highest compliments Eichten says he

received came from former Saint Paul Mayor George Latimer: “I don’t have the faintest idea who Gary votes for or where he would stand on any number of issues.”

He admits that the latter half of his career, which began with his *Midday* hosting, was the most rewarding part of his career, all of which was spent at MPR. From reporter, to news director to station manager and ultimately to host, Eichten’s skills matured, and *Midday* gave him an opportunity to feel closer and more in touch with the listeners, which is where he really felt the most satisfaction.

Ultimately, politicians and other public figures simply trusted him as they looked to MPR as a way to connect with their constituents. Eichten could get Vice-President Walter Mondale to come in and talk for an hour. He could get any corporate CEO to come in. Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura, notoriously prickly with the press, frequently appeared on *Midday*, despite turning down interview requests with other media outlets.

Eichten’s preparation was critical to each show’s success. His typical daily *Midday* routine began with getting up at 3:30 a.m. for an early start on the news: reviewing new developments, formulating questions, and mentally sketching out the day’s program. Then he’d drive to MPR in the dark, spend the morning writing *Midday*’s script, and have popcorn and a Coke for lunch.

The team supporting Gary included producers, reporters, engineers from the newsroom that MPR built over two decades. Eichten credits his producer Sara Meyer as an unsung hero who totally kept the show afloat. “I think it’s invaluable for listeners because there’s an entire hour devoted to one important topic,” says Meyer. “Selecting and editing these programs is fascinating work that I’ve enjoyed for a very long time.”

Together Eichten and Meyer made *Midday* the place to go to get information, “particularly in the realms of political and legislative coverage, I think,” says Eichten. “It took a long time to build up that reputation.”

MPR—“The Glue That Holds It All Together”

Over the years, MPR built a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO). MPR had been broadcasting SPCO concerts, often nationally, since the 1970s, and the ensemble’s musicians were the first to perform in the premiere broadcast of the trailblazing *Saint Paul Sunday Morning* program, hosted by the orchestra’s longtime associate conductor Bill McGlaughlin.

The SPCO was one of the first orchestras anywhere able to grasp that partnering with a culturally aligned broadcaster like MPR could boost the ensemble’s international reputation, regional presence, and marketing. However, artistic excellence didn’t translate to financial health.

By 1993, high expenses had left the SPCO with a large debt and no ready plan to reduce it. The orchestra was on the brink of ruin, teetering close to bankruptcy. Even after its musicians agreed to shorter seasons and a reduction in the size of the orchestra, many in Saint Paul’s business community regarded the orchestra as doomed to fail, and orchestra members felt unappreciated in their home town.

Determined to lead the preservation of a community musical treasure, in only a few days Michael Barone and Bill Kling worked up a plan to prevent the SPCO’s collapse, launching this special effort only after the SPCO Board dealt with the governance and oversight issues that had led to the financial fiasco. MPR would broadcast an on-air fundraising campaign, the kind of event that listeners were now quite familiar with, but this time the beneficiary of 100 percent of the raised money would be the SPCO.



A trumpeter plays from the rooftop of the MPR building to raise awareness for the Save Our SPCO radiothon in October 1993.

Because the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prohibited public radio stations from raising money for other organizations, MPR sought special permission to launch the campaign. It was granted. Only twice before had the FCC given any broadcaster a similar exemption: when fire destroyed

the summer concert home of the National Symphony Orchestra in Virginia in 1981, and eight years later, to finance rebuilding efforts following a devastating earthquake that struck California's San Francisco Bay area.

MPR called its campaign Save Our SPCO or "S.O.S.". The S.O.S. drive aired for two days in October 1993. Between requests for donations, MPR broadcast SPCO recordings, live performances by SPCO musicians, and impassioned interviews with people throughout the community. Garrison Keillor dedicated a portion of that week's *A Prairie Home Companion* show to support the Orchestra and updated fans on the fundraising progress. Shocking everyone, the fundraising brought in nearly \$750,000, exceeding Kling's estimate sevenfold. SPCO music director Hugh Wolff called the Save Our SPCO campaign the most important nonmusical event in the orchestra's history.

MPR had gone to the mat in helping a struggling partner and precious community resource. As a result, the SPCO regained its footing and reclaimed its future. Minnesotans retained access to high-quality music performances.



Eric Friesen hosted MPR's broadcasts of the Minnesota Orchestra and a show called *The Music Room* in the early 1990s.

Essay by

Kyu-Young Kim

On October 29, 1993, Minnesota Public Radio saved the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra from going out of business. It's not hyperbole—just a simple statement of fact. The SPCO was on financial life support that fall, \$1.6 million in the hole, its line of credit about to run out, and no plan for how to dig itself out. Michael Barone, the voice of the SPCO on MPR broadcasts, was Savior-in-Chief, having come up with the idea for a “Save Our SPCO” radiothon with MPR president Bill Kling.

MPR needed to get a special exemption from the Federal Communications Commission in order to even raise funds for an outside party. The only two times the FCC had granted this waiver had been for natural disasters, and while you could call the finances of the SPCO at that time a disaster, it wasn't the same as raising money for recovery efforts from an earthquake. Nevertheless, the exemption was granted, and over a period of 35 hours starting at 6 a.m. on that Friday morning in the fall of 1993, MPR raised almost \$750,000 through over 5,300 pledges from community members, breathing new life back into the SPCO.

I first came to the Twin Cities in 2000 as Associate Concertmaster of the SPCO, and I was immediately struck by how

close my orchestra colleagues were with the MPR engineers and hosts. Michael Barone was my hero, not because of the radiothon (about which I knew nothing at the time), but because he offered to record pro bono some chamber music concerts that my wife Pitnarry Shin, a cellist with Minnesota Orchestra, and I were organizing at our church. How generous and selfless can one guy be? Then MPR offered to record our concerts and broadcast them. It was almost too good to be true, and to be honest, I think we took it for granted. Pitnarry and I moved to New York in 2005 to pursue other musical opportunities. (When my wife and I organized a benefit concert at Lincoln Center, WNYC didn't come knocking on our door to broadcast the concert.) By the time we moved back to the Twin Cities in 2011, our eyes were wide open to how special the Twin Cities musical community was, and to MPR's role as the glue that holds it all together.

Ironically enough, our faith in the Twin Cities community's commitment to classical music was called into question a year after we came back with concurrent lockouts at both Minnesota Orchestra and the SPCO. MPR's coverage of the crisis was in-depth and exhaustive, and there is no doubt that the intensity of the media coverage helped to keep the community's focus on the immediacy and importance of finding a resolution.

We came very close to picking up and moving back to New York, but we're so glad that we stayed. When the SPCO came out of its lockout, I took on the additional role of artistic planning with the organization, essentially doubling down on my bet that the SPCO would survive and thrive. Three years later, we can look back and

marvel at how completely things have turned around. The most important lesson from the lockout is undoubtedly that an orchestra can never take its community for granted again. At the SPCO, we have recently adopted the following as our guiding principle: the SPCO exists to enrich our community by sharing transformational performances with the broadest possible audience.

Compare that to MPR's mission statement: to enrich the mind and nourish the spirit, thereby enhancing the lives and expanding the perspectives of our audiences, and assisting them in strengthening their communities.

MPR and the SPCO are bonded together by this shared mission to improve people's lives by connecting them more deeply to their humanity. When you think about it that way, it makes sense that the FCC gave MPR the green light to raise money for the SPCO back in 1993. Making people's lives better on a daily basis the way that MPR does it, whether through its in depth news shows, thoughtful commentary, or unparalleled classical music programming (including lots of SPCO recordings and broadcasts of course!), is just as important as disaster relief.

Happy 50th Anniversary MPR from your friends at the SPCO and thanks for all that you do for the community!

Congress Backs Off

Public support for the arts can quickly change. In the spring of 1995, more than the fragrance of cherry blossoms was in the air in Washington, D.C. A powerful group of U.S. Senators and Congressional Representatives, with House Speaker Newt Gingrich leading the charge, wanted to end federal support for public broadcasting within three years.

Their main target was the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the non-profit agency created by Congress in 1967 to strengthen American public radio and television broadcasting. By 1995, the CPB budget had reached \$285 million, representing a tiny fraction of the overall federal budget—but that wasn't the picture painted by those opposed to it.

Senator Rod Grams of Minnesota, a former KMSP-TV newscaster, joined forces with those who opposed CPB funding. Kling had a ready response to Grams's belief that public broadcasting was a luxury. "Who knits this country together? Who makes sure that people who are making decisions on school boards and legislatures and in corporations and foundations get the information that they should have?" Kling asked. "Newspapers do it to some extent. But electronically, it's public broadcasting."

If Congress gave its approval, the cuts to CPB would lop thousands of dollars from Minnesota Public Radio's annual funding. People at MPR remembered similar threats from ten years earlier, when the Reagan administration had placed federal funding of public broadcasting under similar scrutiny. The 1995 threat was an even bigger danger. Although CPB funding made up only a minor part of MPR's annual direct income, it accounted for much more of the yearly



Laura McCallum, managing editor for daily news, 2002.

revenues of other public radio broadcasters, especially the smaller stations. Those stations often used CPB money to purchase and air programming from national producers like MPR, PRI, and NPR. The loss of CPB funding would grievously harm broadcasters and program creators alike, while depriving listeners of news and cultural shows they depended on.

MPR took swift action. MPR Board members traveled to Washington to lobby Congress. These were powerful attempts to harness the talents of MPR's community at a crucial time. Similarly, MPR's members wasted no time in responding to the 1995 funding threat. That spring the number of individual members shot up by 6,000, breaking the 70,000 mark and bringing the membership rate to 18% of listeners, the highest in all of noncommercial radio. MPR could also rely on its listeners to be moved to act by the value they placed on community, education, and civic commitment. And act they did, making their voices heard in the halls of Congress, showing remarkable diversity in race, religion, political affiliation and geography.



Dan Olson interviews Holocaust Survivor Lucy Smith in March 1997 for *Voices of Minnesota*, a popular occasional series produced by MPR.

In the end, CPB survived the Congressional attack of 1995. House Speaker Gingrich later admitted that he had underestimated the public's love of public broadcasting.

Diversifying Funding Sources

MPR believed its work to generate income through a mixture of non-profit and for-profit enterprises would protect it from the worst damage caused by potential cuts to government funding of public broadcasting. In the 1980s a new industry group called the Temporary Commission on Alternate Funding (TCAF) formed in response to President Reagan's proposal to replace CPB funding with earned revenues that the stations themselves generated. TCAF soon included members of Congress, FCC commissioners, and CEOs.

Kling was a member of TCAF and watched as public television experimented with a temporary authorization to run actual commercials on public television. He and others argued that no financial benefit to public broadcasters would result; the advertising money gained would be offset by the resulting inability to take advantage of non-commercial rates in many copyright and content licensing agreements.

As an alternative, Kling proposed the idea of “enhanced underwriting”—a change that allowed broadcasters to provide more descriptive underwriting announcements while remaining non-profit and non-commercial. PBS President Hartford Gunn joined Kling in this recommendation, and TCAF proposed this change that had a great influence on public broadcasting.

Meanwhile, MPR had continued developing the entrepreneurial activities of its for-profit Greenspring Company. By the 1990s, Rivertown Trading Company, a subsidiary of Greenspring, had expanded beyond selling goods to public radio fans. It also created and managed catalogs bearing the imprimatur of other organizations, including *Signals*, developed as a public television catalog tied



Bill Kling, Conley Brooks, Donna Avery, Tom McBurney, Tom Kigin, and Steve Rothchild, commemorating the sale of Rivertown (April 30, 1998).

to WGBH-TV in Boston, *Seasons*, for younger customers, and a catalog for the United States Golf Association.

In 1995, Rivertown was booming and generating royalties to support MPR's public service work. Three years later, Rivertown's Donna Avery proposed to Target Corporation that they join with Rivertown in developing a series of catalogs designed around Target concepts. Instead, Target's Jerry Storch made an offer to buy the company. Greenspring's Board approved the offer from Target Corp, and sold Rivertown to Target for an overall price close to \$135 Million.

Most of the proceeds from the sale of Rivertown went directly from Greenspring Company into MPR's endowment to help fund future programming and expansion in perpetuity. Critics looked askance at the payment of incentive-based "value participation units" that had been accrued by Rivertown's and Greenspring's officers and that were now distributed at the time of the sale. But the benefits to MPR were undeniable. Thanks to Greenspring, MPR instantly

had the largest endowment in public radio.

The response to the sale of Rivertown showed that public's perception of the parallel but separate affairs of MPR and Greenspring was often unclear. In 1998, shortly before the sale of Rivertown Trading Company was complete, the office of Minnesota Attorney General Skip Humphrey began an examination of the connection between the two sibling entities.

To explain the connection between MPR and Greenspring, Kling and MPR Board member Steve Rothschild went on the MPR airwaves to answer questions from listeners. They explained the connection between MPR and Greenspring, and how it had financially enabled MPR to grow from a small collection of stations to the largest regional public radio network in the country, a developer of radio talent and programming that was influential around the world.

Ultimately, the Attorney General found in favor of MPR. MPR's relationship to Greenspring Company was legal. The rules surrounding confidentiality varied between the two entities. The compensation paid to non-profit MPR's officers was a matter of public record; the compensation paid to for profit Greenspring's officers was confidential. The compensation within the Greenspring companies was within normal bounds, and that there was no wrongdoing or questionable sharing of assets between MPR, Greenspring, and the officers of either organization. The innovative corporate structure could continue to provide its intended support for advancing the mission of MPR to serve its audiences and members.



Garrison Keillor and Bill Kling share the stage at the Fitzgerald Theater during a thank you event following the sale of Rivertown Trading Company in 1998.

Reviving the Radio Documentary

The news and information department was one part of the organization that benefited from MPR's newly enlarged endowment. MPR decided to use a portion of those resources to build upon the legacy of its legendary radio documentarian Greg Barron, who spent nearly a decade during the 1970s producing work of unrivaled insight and craft.

Barron's MPR documentaries included two Peabody Award-winners—*The Prairie Was Quiet*, an acoustic homage to the American grasslands, and *The Way to 8-A*, a portrait of the psych ward at Hennepin County Medical Center (now Hennepin Healthcare) and an examination of Minnesota's psychiatric commitment laws. Barron later wrote that he made these documentaries at MPR "as a personal passion. I have no idea why. All I know is that I wanted to tell stories as I explored the world around me, and I wanted to tell them in a way that involved more than old-school talking heads. I aspired to make something beautiful as well."

With that inspirational backdrop, MPR began to devote more money and staff time to reclaiming the art of radio documentary, which had nearly gone extinct since Barron's era. One of the early revivers of the form was Stephen Smith, a young print reporter who arrived at MPR in 1982 after the newspaper that employed him was sold. He worked his way up to general assignment reporting for MPR, "everything from parades to plane crashes," he says. He covered state politics for four years, and then opportunities arose for him to file long-form stories.

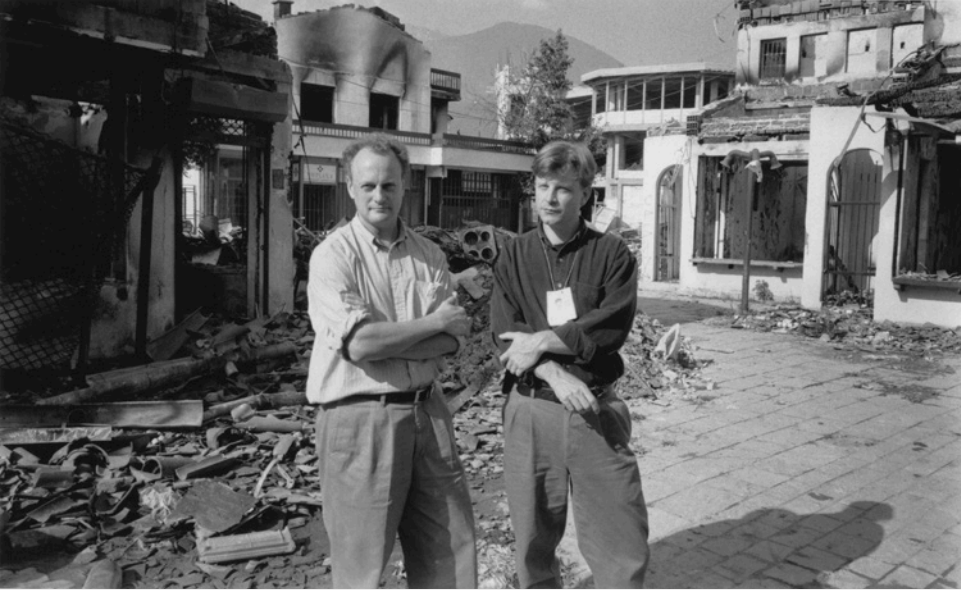
"I was arguing that we should create a regular ongoing initiative to make

documentaries for radio, and there weren't a lot of people doing that at the time." One public radio producer told Smith that documentaries were dinosaurs on the verge of extinction and warned he'd never go anywhere with them. "I ignored him, which was a good idea," Smith says.

The hiring of Bill Buzenberg in 1998 as senior vice president of news cleared a way for the type of work Smith and some of his MPR colleagues loved. Buzenberg, who had expanded *All Things Considered* and launched *Talk of the Nation* in a similar role with NPR, liked the idea of creating a documentary and investigative news unit. Under the umbrella of *American RadioWorks*, an initiative that began as a collaboration between MPR and NPR, Smith and his colleagues, including Daniel Zwerdling and Deborah George, began producing powerful hour-long documentaries. The unit's work on such topics as the Lockerbie bombing, educational disparities, and many projects on African American history won acclaim and influenced domestic and international policy. *American RadioWorks* complemented its documentaries with additional stories, maps, photos, and documents available online for listeners who wanted more information.

In one of the *American RadioWorks* documentaries, *Massacre at Cuska* (2000), Smith and correspondent Michael Montgomery located several Serbian soldiers who had taken part in the killing of 41 ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in 1999. In one memorable scene, *American RadioWorks* interviewed one of the soldiers while a shrieking pig was being slaughtered nearby. Because of its powerful use of dramatic scenes, ambient sound, and innovative story structure, the documentary won the Columbia Dupont Gold Baton, broadcasting's equivalent to the Pulitzer Prize.

Freed from the obligations of covering daily news and able to spend months in pursuit of a story, *American RadioWorks*' documentarians helped create a new acceptance and appreciation of long-form work on public radio. This work continues within the MPR Newsroom and in the subsequent APM Reports,



Stephen Smith and Michael Montgomery standing in rubble of wartorn Kosovo. The duo co-produced a documentary series called *The Promise of Justice* for American RadioWorks. The four part documentary examined war crimes and ethnic cleansing during the Kosovo War.

a nationally-focused investigative unit of American Public Media (APM) that combined *American RadioWorks* with a new team working on stories of regional and national importance that uncover injustices and abuses of power at every level. Like the print investigative reporters of earlier decades, APM Reports team members Madeleine Baran, Tom Scheck, Sasha Aslanian, Curtis Gilbert, managing director Chris Worthington and others untangle the knotted activities and unethical practices of prominent people, organizations, and companies.

Music Through the Night

Much of what listeners have always loved about public radio is its dedication to providing great content that commercial radio could or would not, including documentaries and classical music.

In 1979, when MPR championed and connected to the revolutionary public radio satellite distribution system via its own uplink, Kling had predicted that eventually it would be cheaper for many stations to subscribe to a full-time classical music service than it would be for them produce it themselves.

The prediction came to pass in 1995, with the start of Classical 24, produced by MPR and distributed by Public Radio International (PRI), then a subsidiary of MPR. With this 24/7 service, MPR became the backbone of classical music for the public radio system in America. Eventually Classical 24 boasted more listeners nationwide than any other classical music radio service—about two million people per week.

For local stations without the resources to program world-class classical music all day, it was a watershed moment. Stations anywhere in the U.S. can subscribe to Classical 24 and have a live, high-quality, classical music service to supplement their own regular programming. For many, this enabled them to stay on the air 24/7 without substantially increased programming costs. The Classical 24 library, established and housed at MPR, grew to more than 50,000 classical CDs. One special slice of the service, *Music Through the Night*, serves the needs and interests of night owls and can trace its lineage back to MPR's Arthur Hoehn spinning late-night records decades earlier.

Heard across the country, Classical 24 features the familiar voices of classical

announcers heard on Classical MPR, the regional network. Lynn Warfel, a singer and actor who appeared in *The Rockford Files* and *Mommie Dearest*, had been the first woman staff announcer at the commercial classical station KFAC in Los Angeles before joining the MPR staff. After time hosting regional classical programming, she began taking the mic in a national program on

Classical 24. One of her colleagues there is Julie Amacher, a veteran of music broadcasting in Wisconsin, Colorado, and North Carolina. Amacher joined MPR in 1997 and became program director of both Classical 24 and Classical MPR. Other voices of Classical 24 and Classical MPR include Melissa Ousley, Mindy Ratner, Andrea Blain, Scott Blankenship, John Birge, Jeff Esworthy, Valerie Kahler, Elena See, Steve Seel and John Zech. These and many other talented hosts were supported by a terrific cast of programming managers and staff, including Rex Levang who, during his decades-long career at MPR, thoughtfully selected and artfully scheduled the classical music that was presented to local and national audiences, every day.



Bill Morelock and Bob Christiansen, hosts of Bob & Bill, a nationally syndicated classical program. (1994)

Essay by

Tom Crann

“What do you think you’re doing up on that chair?” my mother shrieked. “Get down; you’ll fall!” I was probably 12 years old. I was in fact up on a kitchen chair, with the radio on, loud. I was stretching over the sink, with the electrical plug in my hand. I was listening for the precise moment to plug that clock back in to synchronize it with the hourly tone on WOR.

At that age, I didn’t yet know about Minnesota Public Radio. I grew up in New Jersey and was fascinated by the radio. I loved its sounds, like that tone at the top of the hour. The teletype sounds behind newsradio and the music radio jingles; the beep-boops of Larry King’s Mutual network; and the bee-dee-DEE-duh-dee of the CBS hourly newscast. I loved all the inner and mysterious workings of radio. I was the cliché of the radio kid who had an RCA transistor with an earphone under my pillow. I’d wheedled it out of my grandfather after he’d gotten a newer, fancier one. As I look back, it may seem strange, or even grandiose, but radio was my destiny.

I played the trumpet in school band, terribly. I had little talent and less dedication to practicing. But I loved the sounds the instruments of the orchestra made. After a music appreciation class in freshman year of high school, I was excited to know the

Beethoven Symphonies and the Bach Brandenburg concertos I was introduced to in class showed up regularly on one of the THREE New York stations that played classical music in those days. I was hooked.

One of those was WNYC in New York, still the primary public radio station in the city today. At 4 pm in those days, Mozart and Schubert gave way to a smart, calm, cultured program called “All Things Considered.” It sounded different than almost every other show you’d hear on the radio. Each afternoon, you’d got more than a newscast. You got context, and expertise, and some style. Much of it was done in the intimate interview style you’ll still hear today, when we’re at our best.

If I could have seen into the future, my future at MPR seemed to solidify when I got to my college radio station. There we played classical music from an old LP library, donated when a commercial station changed format. They also had news-talk shows. I did them both, interviewing the mayor of Providence for the call-in show, and playing Bach cantatas on his 300th birthday in 1985. I loved doing it all. Little did I suspect at nineteen that I’d be lucky enough to find a place like MPR, where I could have a career first in classical music, now in news, at such a high level, for such an appreciative audience.

A guy named Pat Weaver was an early broadcasting boss at NBC. He came up with the idea of the communicator as a job title for the first host of the Today show. I’ve always liked that idea. Whether it’s the excitement and complexity of a new recording of a Mahler Symphony, or the latest development we’ve just

learned from Washington, I feel like the job is essentially the same. Communicate to the listener. Why is it exciting? What's happened? And eventually, why is it important? Novelist E.M. Forster put it in two words: "only connect." I've taken that as a motto for what I do. Connecting with you the listener, whether it's the news of the day or the great music of the ages.

I started at MPR 25 years ago. When I look back, I still think it's ironic that my first day of work was the last day of a member drive. Ironic since I'd go on to do so many drives here at MPR, and recently so many final shifts. Back in 1995, I moved here to join the announcing staff of Classical 24, one of the simple, excellent ideas of public broadcasting: MPR offering the great music and good company of its excellent regional classical station nationwide. (I'm literally listening to it as I write this.) On occasional cross-country drives, I still love tuning in classical music on the car radio from a station I don't know, and when the piece ends, hearing one of my colleagues in Saint Paul, the announcer, connecting directly with me.

A few years ago, I had to moderate a panel with some experts, and one of them was a state commissioner. Before we sat down, there was a bit of small talk and he quipped: boy you must hate those pledge drives! My answer surprised him. Sure, I know listeners find them intense and repetitive. But It's a pretty good day at work when you get to hear from people who really like what you do so much that they call and tell you. And then they give you money. He was quiet for a moment and said: "that part must be great!" It is, especially in the final hours of a drive, when the calls

and online gifts are coming in almost quicker than we can keep up with them. That's my answer to people who ask: how can you do those member drives? It's the part where appreciative people call in with compliments and money. That part is great.

Here's another question people ask me all the time: why does public radio sound so good here compared to other places they've been, even larger cities? Our music shows and hosts are first rate, and our news is in-depth and richer than so many other stations. My answer: the audience. The quality of what you hear here is due to the quality of the audience and the quality of their support. That support always amazes but never surprises me. So, next time you hear those last hours of a member drive, you're hearing that process playing out, live on the air. The audience we strive to connect with is connecting with us in a profound way. I'm always thrilled to be a part of that.

Venturing Online

By the time Classical 24 emerged, MPR had already undergone a digital revolution. Starting in the mid-1990s, audio tape was gradually disappearing from operations, along with the razor blades needed for editing and the tangled piles of cut tape that were the outcome.

Audio tape edits could be challenging. Early in his career, journalist Stephen Smith once looked at one of those piles with dismay when he realized he had misunderstood his producer's instructions. Smith had cut an hour-long speech down to two minutes, when he was supposed to remove two minutes from the speech.

This change to digital was immensely important to everyone at MPR who was involved in the recording, editing, managing, and storing of audio. But listeners noticed few differences until 1995, when MPR introduced itself to the online world at mpr.org. Once again, MPR was pioneering new technology to engage its members and audiences.

John Pearson, originally hired at MPR as a graphic designer, worked by himself in a windowless dark room, struggling mightily to set up the first MPR website and make it useful. Most of the initial online content came from *A Prairie Home Companion*, but Pearson sprinkled the site with a little bit from the classical service and a little from the news service. The news stories had to be undated because they would stay up for about ten days.

Bob Collins, who became MPR News' first online editor in 1999 and went on to write MPR's popular *NewsCut* blog, remembers this early digital face of MPR. "We started the MPR website with a CPB grant to come up with a model

that public radio stations could use to build a website and still do radio; we literally pioneered how a newsroom could do this,” believes Collins.

At the start, few people visited the site. “Because the website didn’t have an audience, there wasn’t a lot of risk in trying innovative things,” Collins says. “We could come up with an idea at 9:00 a.m. and be doing it by 10:00 a.m. And most people at MPR were none the wiser about what we were doing.”

As an example, Collins had an early idea to post on the website a recording of the very first broadcast of *A Prairie Home Companion* from 1974. He found it in a basement archive on reel-to-reel tape, digitally encoded it, and posted it on the new website. Nobody at MPR had listened to that recording for years, and the awkwardness of the premiere show made for quite a contrast with the artistry of more recent performances. It was soon removed, but not for quality reasons. Although this was a creative use of the internet, the organization simply didn’t have the necessary music rights to post the show on its website.

Over time, MPR’s website improved, the content was fleshed out, and more stories were optimized for publication. Initially streaming audio did not sound great, and streaming video staggered and stalled from start to finish. The early website featured tabs for MPR’s national productions and a gateway to a page called MNonline, which attempted to categorize and list links to every website based in Minnesota. This seems an overwhelming task today, but it was possible to compile in the early day of the web.

Collins established connections with others in the newsroom. He and



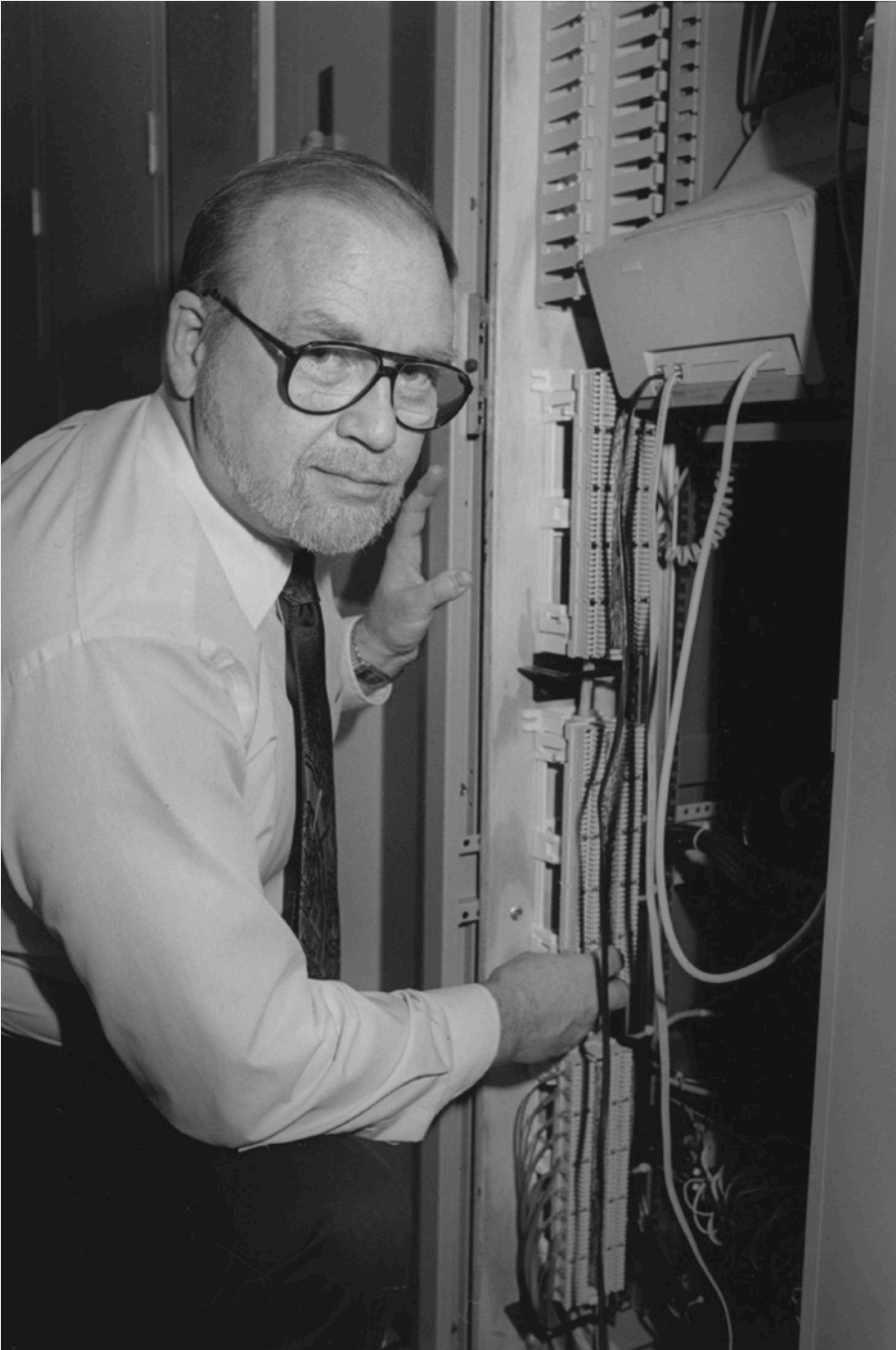
John Pearson proudly represents his brainchild, mpr.org, at the APHC Street Dance in 2001. John was the driving force behind Minnesota Public Radio expanding beyond the airwaves and planting the MPR flag on the beachhead of the internet.

his colleagues identified a few reporters, including Mary Losure and Martin Kaste, who were willing to put their reporting online. Soon more reporters felt comfortable publishing their work online, too. For Collins, the day he talked the engineering department into adding “mpr.org” to the electronic news banner outside the building marked another breakthrough.

MPR leaders pushed the organization to make the most of its digital presence. It was growing clear that MPR had to meet its audience wherever they wanted to listen to its programming, whether broadcast or online. “It now seems laughable to see what we were thinking we could do with the Internet,” says Susan Boren. “We knew how to do radio.” The evolution in thinking transformed MPR’s future.

As MPR explored the capabilities of this new medium, the website allowed it to repackage news and other programming using staff already at hand. It also suggested new possibilities for partnerships and sponsorships. To Kling, the interactive aspects of the Internet to engage with audiences interested him as much as the medium’s potential as a conduit for international distribution of audio.

A landmark digital event occurred in 1998 when MPR broadcast on the radio a production by the Minnesota Opera of Puccini’s *Tosca*, with a simultaneous webcast that included streaming audio, an online libretto, images from the story, and a message board for fans around the world to discuss the opera. It is believed to be the first appearance of live opera online. “I hope we introduced some online people to opera and some opera people to the internet,” said John Pearson at the time.



Ralph Hornberger, Director of Engineering (1997).

Scaling Up, Coast to Coast

MPR programming went national on an even bigger big scale during its 1990s expansion era. Many other earlier shows, including Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra broadcasts, *A Prairie Home Companion*, *Pipedreams*, and *Saint Paul Sunday*, had reached national audiences in decades past. But a steady stream of new MPR-produced programs designed for listeners from coast to coast hit the airwaves as the century neared an end.

In the years to come, the organization would form a new in-house distribution brand. American Public Media (APM), would carry MPR-produced programming to public radio stations around the world. These shows introduced MPR personalities to a wider audience and deepened MPR's influence on public radio's creativity and aesthetic as a whole.

One of the earliest programs APM distributed was the personal finance show *Sound Money*, hosted by MPR news mainstay Bob Potter. A stock market devotee since childhood and a long-time fan of the *Wall Street Week* TV program as an adult, Potter lamented the shortage of investment information on public radio. In the mid-1980s he mused about the opportunity to Rick Lewis, then MPR Vice President for News “or it might have been Uncle Bill [Kling] himself, I'm not sure.”

Potter was encouraged to cook up a format and pilot show for a program, and found Chris Farrell, a financial reporter in New York who spoke about personal finance in a series of appearances on MPR's *Midday*. Potter, Farrell, gifted producer Karen Tofte and Twin Cities finance guru Erica Whittlinger formed the core group at *Sound Money*. “Chris and Erica were good talkers



MPR welcomes Bill Ivey, recently named President of National Endowment for the Arts, to a taping of *Saint Paul Sunday* in the Fitzgerald Theater on June 18, 1998. (L to R) Will Haddeland, MPR Vice President of Public Affairs; Bill Ivey, President of the National Endowment for the Arts; Bill McLaughlin, Host of *Saint Paul Sunday*; and Mary Lee, Producer of *Saint Paul Sunday*.

who could explain stuff in a simple and friendly way, and they were smart,” Potter says.

With a modest budget and a plan to explore a wide swath of finance topics including retirement planning, college planning, taxes, investing, and estate planning, *Sound Money* went on the air. For the first three months *Sound Money* aired as a local show; after that it was uplinked to the public radio satellite for national distribution. The audience response was phenomenal, and the phone lines lit up.

The show grew and increasingly added appearances by national finance experts. The satellite connections between hosts and guests became complicated, and Potter remembers one show in which three feeds failed, leaving Potter on the air all by himself to fill time. He toughed it out for a good long while until everyone was patched together again.

Following on their positive experience with a weekly financial advice program, MPR made several efforts to create a daily business program—first *Business Times*, in partnership with a nascent cable network, then *Business Update*, which was produced in partnership with CBS Radio. Neither show was sustainable, but *Business Update* was an inspiration for *Marketplace*, a daily financial news report developed by Lewis (while he was a manager at KLON in Long Beach) and producer Jim Russell.

Initially struggling at KLON, *Marketplace* was acquired by KUSC in Los Angeles, and then found its home with APM in 2000. *Sound Money* continued to operate as a weekend financial advice program, but was renamed *Marketplace Money* and then *Marketplace Weekend* after APM acquired *Marketplace*.

Just as *Sound Money* broke new ground in personal finance programming for national listeners, *The Splendid Table* appeared when audiences were ready for a program that delved into the cultural meanings of food. In the early 1990s, Lynne Rossetto Kasper had written *The Splendid Table*, a James Beard award-winning book that explored 500 years of eating in a northern Italian region. In its pages, Rossetto Kasper considered what makes cuisine a cultural force.

Producer Sally Swift, a former production assistant for Prince who had a hand in a variety of TV shows including The Disney Channel's broadcasts of *A Prairie Home Companion*, heard Rossetto Kasper in an NPR interview about the book and asked if she had ever considered going into radio. Radio appealed to Rossetto Kasper, who hadn't been thrilled by earlier proposals she received to cook in front of TV cameras. She loved telling the stories behind the food. Swift and Rossetto Kasper conceived *The Splendid Table* as a national radio program and took it to MPR. With producer Tom Voegeli's help and guidance, it went on the air in 1994.

There was much to learn. In the earliest broadcasts, Rossetto Kasper and Swift tried to negotiate the fine line between food stories they knew people wanted to know more about and more offbeat tangents or points of view that

might perk up listeners' ears.

Unlikely topics often found their way to the show. In one early show, the guest was a well-known master gardener who owned an organic nursery. Swift, a formidable gardener herself, kept whispering into Rosetto Kasper's earpiece to find out how the guest kept deer away from the garden without hurting them. Rosetto Kasper posed the question, and the guest replied, "OK, you're going to set a collection of cinderblocks around the garden, and then you're going to pee on them." Dead silence followed, and then the show ended. "Let's put it this way," Rosetto Kasper says. "That doesn't come up in a lot in food shows."

The Splendid Table has featured some of the biggest names in food as guest hosts, and is carried live by stations across the country. *The Splendid Table* was one of the first programs to interview soon-to-be celebrities Michael Pollan and Anthony Bourdain. The program visited activist Alice Waters in her first school garden in California, interviewed the explorer Anne Bancroft from Antarctica, and featured scientist Sidney Perkowitz talking about the physics of cappuccino foam. "In five minutes, he took us from looking into a coffee cup to looking at the stars," Kasper says. "That's what this subject can do. It's that vast."

The program brought in the talents of technical director Jennifer Luebke and producer Jennifer Russell. This group of four developed many regular segments popular with the audience, including "Stump the Cook," and a



Lynne Rosetto Kasper, 1997.

section featuring instant triage for meals in jeopardy. “Turkey Confidential,” the popular annual national Thanksgiving call-in show, helps listeners with cooking, etiquette and other holiday emergencies. A listener favorite was the Thanksgiving Day caller who was bringing pumpkin pie to her first meal with her new in-laws. She dropped the pie on the way to her car. Frantically calling Turkey Confidential, she was calmed by Lynn who suggested she simply ignore the original request for pie and tell everyone she was bringing pumpkin custard.

When Rosetto Casper retired in late 2017, former New York Times food writer Francis Lam and a longtime guest host and contributor on the show, was named her successor. Lam believes that his highest professional calling is to talk to people, especially about food, and to revel in the stories that bring us together. Lam’s long history as a food writer and editor as well as his background in both creative writing and Asian studies bring a new perspective to the show as it positions itself for the next generation of listeners.

A few years after the launch of *The Splendid Table* came another new program destined for a national audience: *Speaking of Faith* (later becoming *On Being*). The program was the creation of journalist Krista Tippett, a graduate of the Yale Divinity School. She had noticed how difficult it was for people to talk about religion and spirituality, and she thought public radio would be the perfect medium for in-depth reporting and discussions. But Tippett didn’t know anyone working in radio. Through a friend she connected with Bill Buzenberg, then the new senior vice president of MPR news, who had previously created a religion beat for NPR. Tippett met with Buzenberg. He agreed a program about religion and spirituality was a good idea and asked her to write up a proposal, although he warned that nothing would probably come of it.

Tippett began holding conversations about faith with a variety of people in a range of disciplines, giving her momentum to launch the program. Without focus groups or much experience, Tippett assembled a couple of pilot shows that drew a big response from listeners. That attention drew funders, and by

2001 Tippett was hosting a monthly special regional program.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the national climate took a turn and the hunger for a spiritual forum was fierce. More funding came in, new topics presented themselves, and *Speaking of Faith* became a weekly program that explored issues in religion and spirituality with all the intelligence and nuance that the arts, politics, and public affairs customarily received on public radio.

There was no model for a religion program that demanded steady attention from listeners, but the contributions of Marge Ostroushko, veteran MPR producer, and Brian Newhouse, managing director of classical programming, gave *Speaking of Faith* a strong and steady push into the unknown. The listeners came.

The word *faith*, Tippett believes, had been hijacked by extremists of all religions to fit their agendas. But in discussing faith on the program, she learned the meaning of faith was fluid and wonderfully indefinable. It means many things to different people. She interviewed atheists and agnostics, scientists, ethicists, theologians, and artists—all in pursuit of good questions instead of answers and toward a goal of civil conversations.

To Tippett, a good guest for the program is someone like the civil rights activist Ruby Sales, who can go into the spiritual dimensions of her long experience fighting for human rights. “This show really has power in the world,” Tippett says, “but I’ve always been very ambitious about what more we can do and what we can become.”

After changing the program’s name to *On Being*, Tippett and her team now produce the program through a stand-alone non-profit organization. Her subject matter, to the delight of her listeners, is an ever-shifting work in progress.

MPR’s expansion in new directions also brought it closer to its audiences through live performances and by talking with members and listeners. As Father Colman had foreseen, MPR brought together communities to talk about what was important and beautiful in their lives—whether at the Minnesota State

Fair or learning the stories of food and the people who create it or exploring the spiritual, and sometimes controversial, through open conversations. In a variety of ways and venues, MPR came out from inside the radio to engage its communities, to enlighten and to learn from listeners.

CHAPTER 4



Growing the Network

For decades, Minnesota Public Radio's story had been built on growth and innovation.

MPR was ahead of the crowd in producing and distributing national radio programming. Always looking for the next way to change and improve public radio brought new challenges and opportunities. Events that began in 2000 led MPR to rearrange longstanding ways of producing and distributing programs. And that change started in Southern California.

The Minnesota Model Goes West

Bill Kling had been going to Los Angeles five times a year since 1985 as a member of the boards of several mutual funds managed by the Capital Group. He was frustrated by what he heard on the public radio stations in town. Primarily owned by community colleges, some stations were part of a speech department and others were part of a community service division. All were regulated by the mission and budget of the parent organization. The stations serving Los Angeles audiences were lacking the components that powered MPR to success in Minnesota.

In 2000, after driving into downtown Los Angeles from the airport on a Wednesday night for the third time in a year, Kling's frustration grew as he listened to the strongest public radio station in the area doing a live broadcast of a Santa Monica city council debate over curb height. He knew that something had to be done to strengthen the influence of public radio in the country's second largest city. He set out to make MPR that force for change.

Given the scope of programming on the existing stations, there wasn't a great platform for MPR's national distribution brand, American Public Media (APM), in the Los Angeles market. Kling immediately identified this gap as a business opportunity. He also felt that in the media capital of the country, a public radio news station needed a strong and single purpose to attract both an audience and the talent necessary to grow the organization.

Kling watched for the opportunity to create a new public radio organization modeled after MPR. He found it when reading about a Pasadena City College's station that was about to be "disqualified" as a CPB-funded station because it

had virtually no audience and was losing money. KPCC was a tiny station with only 600 watts of power or, as one observer said, “Slightly less than a good microwave oven.” But its transmitter on Mount Wilson allowed it to cover a large part of the metropolitan area.

Kling wrote a letter to the president of Pasadena City College offering to help with KPCC. He later heard that his letter had to be fished out of the wastebasket when Cindy Young, a college employee who knew of Kling’s reputation, suggested they take a closer look. MPR offered to buy the station. Nearly two years of negotiations concluded with a meeting between the Pasadena City College trustees and an APM board delegation led by Chairs Tom McBurney and Steve Rothschild and featuring Walter Mondale, MPR board member and former Vice President. At one point, Mondale, sitting with an elected trustee of the college, was overheard saying, “I too have been in public service . . .”

Pasadena City College agreed to a long-term lease of the station by APM. Under its operation by the college, KPCC had broadcast an eclectic mix of original programs of local interest, including many specialty shows that had small, loyal listenerships. Kling envisioned transforming the station into something with broad appeal and a focus on news and information programming.

To create a radio service that would truly benefit the region, Kling and his MPR colleagues spent two years learning about civic and business leaders in Los Angeles. MPR’s reputation and track record of maintaining an innovative and financially healthy network of stations gave traction to their plan. The Minnesotans were tutored on the civic power structure of Los Angeles, thanks in large part to prominent lawyer Ron Olson. Many people had warned Kling that Olson, a principal at Munger Tolles, would have no time for any new initiative, much less public radio. Kling asked him to join the effort anyway. To his surprise, Olson brought together a group of Pasadena’s most influential citizens to hear Kling and MPR’s news head Bill Buzenberg describe their vision. Kling drew two additional board members from that group and then made the

case to Gordy Crawford, the legendary media portfolio counselor for the Capital Group, who also signed on and brought a few friends along.

The result was the creation of Southern California Public Radio (SCPR) in 1999, a new non-profit organization with a strong board of local Los Angeles-area civic and business leaders. Following the model used with other MPR-related corporations, General Counsel and executive vice president Tom Kigin incorporated SCPR as a sister organization to MPR within the APM Group (APMG). To some, it seemed mysterious that an organization based in the Minnesota would want to run a radio station in California. But the reasons made creative and business sense.

The hardworking SCPR Board took full ownership of the future of the station. They hired former NPR Senior Vice President of Programming Bill Davis as founding president. In just a few years, SCPR quickly grew to over 120 employees, built a new state-of-the-art broadcast headquarters in Pasadena, and acquired additional stations. SCPR and its stations are now among the most-listened to public radio networks in the country.

Having just formed SCPR and acquired KPCC, APM saw another opportunity to advance its mission and bring in demonstrated talent and a valuable audience. In the early 2000s, the University of Southern California decided to divest itself of *Marketplace* Productions, producer of the daily business news program *Marketplace*. Over the years, *Marketplace* had grown into one of the most popular programs in public radio.

Seeing future potential where USC saw a lack of synergy, and with advice from KUSC's legendary manager Wally Smith, MPR was able to buy *Marketplace* Productions. MPR moved the *Marketplace* studios from a corner of a drab windowless warehouse under a freeway ramp with chickens inhabiting its dusty yard to a new home in the center of downtown Los Angeles.

Today, *Marketplace* and its portfolio of popular daily programs are hosted by Kai Ryssdal, David Brancaccio and Molly Wood, and reach more than 12

million weekly listeners via some 800 public radio stations, giving it the largest weekly audience of any business program on radio, television, or cable. Since its inception, Marketplace has cultivated a unique sound and offered a distinctive style of storytelling. Over the years, the enterprise has grown and benefited by the creativity and strategic direction of several accomplished public media leaders including Jim Russell, J.J. Yore and Deborah Clark.

The California endeavors contributed significantly to MPR's ever-growing reputation. The acquisition of *Marketplace* made American Public Media (APM) one of the world's largest producers of public radio programs. SCPR has blossomed into one of the nation's most-listened-to public radio networks. "Both have been tremendous learning experiences, and they've made extraordinary contributions to public service," says current MPR and APM Group President Jon McTaggart.

Essay by

Jarl Mohn

Like many others, I have a personal connection to MPR. In a round about way, were it not for them I wouldn't have my job today at NPR.

It started about 15 years ago when I was asked to get involved with KPCC, Southern California Public Radio. MPR acquired an agreement to manage the station for Pasadena City College. The board was looking to expand and I had spent many years early in my career in radio. It seemed like a natural fit. And it was.

I served on that board for around 13 years and worked closely with President Bill Davis, who MPR hired to run the place. I had always listened to public radio but had never gotten engaged. This changed everything. The time I spent at KPCC got me to rediscover my love of the radio medium, its intimacy, its immediacy and its capacity to convey a well told story. Through that station I also got to meet Bill Kling, Jon McTaggart and ultimately Dave Kansas. And thus began my education in public radio.

I saw, firsthand, the influence and impact that MPR had in Minnesota and knew that if we fulfilled our mission in Southern California, we could aspire to do the same there. We all saw the enormous possibilities in a geographically widespread and

demographic diverse city of a well done 24-hour public news talk station. The vision was for SCPR to be a “centering institution” for our Los Angeles, modeled, in many ways, after MPR.

Kling, McTaggart along with Bill Davis constructed a high profile and committed board representing the geography and ethnic diversity of Los Angeles.

KPCC and SCPR went from being the fourth ranked public station in Los Angeles to being one of the most listened to public stations in the country. There are months where it is the number one public station nationally in weekly listeners. Most of the playbook of success came from MPR.

MPR is, and has been, an innovator and thought leader in the public radio system for years. What has been occurring in Minnesota for decades is now happening all over America.

Public radio 1.0 was NPR distributing national and international news and other programming for local stations.

Public radio 2.0 was the wave of adding local news and regular local talk and public affairs shows to these stations. MPR lead the way.

Public radio 3.0 was the beginning of a small number of these stations creating programming for other public stations. The creation of American Public Media and success of their Marketplace is one of the best and most successful examples.

And finally, public radio 3.5, the creation of regional networks of stations to super serve multiple cities, counties and in some cases, states was something also pioneered in Minnesota at MPR. Similar networks have popped up in the northwest, New England,

in Texas and the MidWest with Harvest media. These initiatives have allowed public stations to have even more impact in their communities and regions.

What is next? My belief is that public radio has never been as important as it is now. Newspapers are shrinking in size, reach and influence. Network television news has shifted to shorter and more lifestyle oriented pieces, local television news, to win the ratings race, has shifted to covering crime, fires and scandals; cable television network news is either ideological or sensational; and local radio news content, in most markets barely exists. Public radio has become one of the few places citizens can turn to learn about important events in their towns. This is a tremendous opportunity. The newsroom and journalistic capacity that MPR has built is being replicated in many communities across the country. The massive changes occurring in media and journalism, while wildly disruptive, are also creating an opening and unique void for us in public radio to fill.

Our public system, to succeed, needs more leaders like Kling, McTaggart, Kansas and Davis who are bold enough to commit the resources, build the news organizations, reflect the diversity of their communities and invest in order to take advantage of the opportunity and serve their communities better than anyone else. That requires not only the boldness to expand those staffs but then to reach out to the true leaders in these places to ask their support to invest in quality journalism, content and storytelling.

Thomas Jefferson referred to the importance of having an informed citizenry as the foundation of democracy. And that is why

public radio is more important now than ever as outlets for local journalism shrink and, in many cases, vanish.

All of us at NPR and in public radio continue to look to MPR for innovative thinking, leading the way and charting a path for the other 263 member organizations in America. The path they cleared and led is a true and meaningful one.

Thank you, MPR.

MPR's New Sibling

By the early years of the new century, Public Radio International (PRI), formerly American Public Radio and MPR's first national production distributor, had begun to produce original programs. MPR considered those programs to be in competition with the producers whose work it distributed. In response to what it saw as a clear conflict of interest, MPR withdrew most of its national programs, including *A Prairie Home Companion*, *Marketplace*, and *The Splendid Table*, from PRI distribution and began self-distribution of those programs to other stations. Thus, American Public Media (APM), was created in 2004.

APM combined national program production and distribution under a single roof, allowing MPR to take advantage of its own expertise in bringing new programs to broadcast, studying new opportunities, and marketing shows to other public radio stations. By now, MPR had developed deep capabilities in those areas, having at various times been the parent organization of APR and PRI. MPR's Chris Kohtz designed the initial organizational structure and oversaw the APM sales and distribution team as its first director.

APM quickly surpassed PRI to become America's second-largest producer and distributor of public radio programming (next to NPR), and the biggest producer and distributor of classical music programs. Today APM distributes *Marketplace*, *Pipedreams*, *Live From Here*, *Performance Today*, and *The Splendid Table*, serves as the producer of *Classical 24*, and is the American partner of the *BBC World Service* and *BBC Proms Concerts*. These shows and others from APM would eventually reach more than 20 million listeners each week on nearly a thousand radio stations.

The creation of APM also meant new financial success. Tim Roesler, an MPR senior executive for more than 20 years, recruited and led an intrepid sales team to build vital new relationships and secure new sponsorships and record-breaking underwriting support for APM's national programs.

The broad reach of its programs, the number of listeners, and the range of activities tapping vast resources of knowledge and technology would have been unimaginable in the earliest days of MPR. But community support had lifted MPR from a public radio broadcaster to a juggernaut of public media, whose reach extended into new forms of listening, connecting, engaging, and informing. The MPR of the early 21st century had expanded with the goal of giving its communities what seemed both unexpected and inevitable, all the while gaining support, staying relevant, finding uses for new technology. These were exciting times.

Public Insight Journalism

While SCPR and *Marketplace* brought MPR-style operating innovations to geographic areas beyond Minnesota, new ways of doing things were also appearing close to home in the Saint Paul newsroom.

Bob Collins believes it all began in the early days of the Internet when the newsroom was covering a story about a bear that mauled a boy. “We put that story online, and we then received an email from one of the boy’s family members,” says Collins. News staffers found that exciting and wondered how to tap into the knowledge of listeners and website users.

The next step was the appearance of a little link on MPR’s news webpages. “It just said, ‘Help us cover this story,’ or something to that effect. Our idea was that there was knowledge out there that we could turn into content,” Collins says. Soon Leneord Witt, a very early advocate of “civic journalism” and former newspaperman, found his way to the MPR newsroom office and became an advocate for audience-based knowledge to inform MPR reporting.

Kling, influenced by James Surowiecki’s book *The Wisdom of Crowds*, believed there were experts on nearly any subject among MPR’s listeners who knew more than its journalists did. He envisioned a new model, called “public insight journalism,” that benefited from the expertise of the audience. It gave MPR’s programming more resources to draw upon, and it experimented with distributing that programming in new ways. Michael Skoler, then the managing director of news at MPR, saw the potential of this approach to newsgathering. He championed this new kind of civic journalism, which drew on curated citizen expertise and experiences that was sifted and selected by MPR staff. It

was “primary source” citizen knowledge that MPR was after.

As it evolved at MPR, public insight journalism involved building a database of people with interest and specialized knowledge that was rarely incorporated into news stories. Many of these people had expertise developed in professions and trades where reporters struggled to find contacts. The database grew to include people who voluntarily offered relevant experiences on issues from many areas of life, and the Public Insight Network (PIN) was born.

No other news organization had a resource like this to tap. When news broke or a story was in the works, MPR’s news staff could use the database to find expertise to add to the reporting. Engaging people with diverse backgrounds and insights was much different from accessing the usual go-to sources, and PIN provided a rich pool of new contacts with deep knowledge on a wide range of topics. Better yet, the opinions and concerns of the people in this network suggested where to take the story and who else should be interviewed. Anything could bubble up, increasing listener interest and enriching the story.

Using this new PIN network, reporters started making new connections: Someone knew someone else who might have an idea, and that would lead to a storyline that was fresh and surprising. In that sense, the PIN network worked like an early form of intelligent, knowledgeable, reliable, and curated sourcing at MPR’s disposal long before Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were invented or became widely used. As a bonus, the PIN network allowed the newsroom to build trust among the community, find answers to complex questions, identify what questions to ask, and tap into the community in a meaningful way that the newly forming social media outlets wouldn’t.

The results? Although some veteran reporters preferred to rely upon their own carefully cultivated and trusted sources, others used the Public Insight Network to produce better stories and inform a more involved audience.

Realizing that the Public Insight Network could create a connected web of expertise for other media outlets, MPR moved the resource from the newsroom



Marketplace rings the closing bell of the New York Stock Exchange on October 24, 2005.

to APM. Distributed by APM across the nation, the PIN network could give journalists around the country, many of them working in public broadcasting, a valuable way to add depth and humanity to their stories. Anyone could join as a public source, and the list of organizations and programs using the Network grew to include *Marketplace*, Twin Cities Public Television, the *Washington Post*, Voice of America, the *Miami Herald*, the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, and the Center for Investigative Journalism based in California, among many others.

This early investment in online community engagement led to another opportunity for MPR. Shortly after the social networking boom began in the early 2000s, Boston-based internet entrepreneur Tom Gerace met Kling at a

wedding reception. Gerace conceived of a “social network” called Gather. Kling and Jon McTaggart, then MPR’s Chief Operating Officer (COO), were among the first to embrace the idea at MPR.

In 2005, when Facebook was still focused on college campuses, Gather began hosting discussions and publishing user-created content on a multitude of subjects drawing on the public radio audience of some 30 million people. It satisfied a literate and diverse group of people who wanted to tell stories and engage with each other, but who, until then, lacked a way to do it.

MPR Board member John Rollwagen’s first reaction to the idea was that “public radio listeners may have more in common with each other than they do with the people closest to them in life.”

“It was amazing for Gather to help an audience get rich content from within itself and to develop its own communities and affinities of interest,” McTaggart says. “And we thought those groups could be really interesting for media organizations to tap into.”

The APM Group (APMG) invested in getting Gather off the ground. The social networking site grew in popularity for a few years, and Starbucks adopted it as its favored user-generator content network. People found it a great place to discuss and debate. However, the public radio audience base was not large enough, and the general public wasn’t flocking to it in the numbers it needed to survive.

Although Gather was one of the largest social media sites of the day, advertisers were more interested in other emerging platforms. Soon, Facebook, MySpace and others began competing for the same users, and Gather’s advertising revenues dwindled. Some Gather assets were sold and the original investors (including APM) created a new company, Skyword, that focused on user based content and story telling as a new form of advertising. Skyword turned to a new application for its platform to serve customers of a wide range of leading companies with original content.

“Gather accomplished a great deal of what it was supposed to accomplish, and was way ahead of its time,” McTaggart says. “The audience itself created the content. We think nothing of that now, but back then Facebook barely existed.”

Experimenting with the Third Channel

Listeners who had been with the MPR news and classical stations since the beginning were staying with them, deeply appreciating the in-depth and thoughtful programming public radio had come to be known for. Although it was a critical asset, listener loyalty also presented a challenge for MPR and the industry: Finding ways to attract younger audiences. Increasingly, young adults consumed media in different ways. They grew up on student-run, college radio stations and MTV, and were looking for more options that reflected their lifestyles. The traditional public radio mix of news, classical, jazz, and folk music just wasn't providing what they were seeking.

MPR had long sought to make a distinctive public service contribution to the arts in the Twin Cities—far beyond what's normally expected of a radio station. And MPR aimed to bring more people to public media to expand on the mission of serving the public with programming that nourished the spirit and strengthened the community. The organization had to find a way to connect with new audiences and serve the needs and interests of a rising generation of listeners and potential supporters. Without taking action, MPR would remain important, but it would risk a shrinking audience, and would fall short in its mission to inform, inspire, and entertain its communities.

For years MPR had considered the possibility of adding a channel to serve younger listeners. But the answer to one question had remained elusive: How, specifically, could a fresh format expand MPR's public service?

In 2004, developments in Minnesota broadcasting gave MPR an opportunity. Institutional priorities had changed at Saint Olaf College in Northfield, and the

college wanted to sell WCAL, its classical music public radio station. WCAL had been broadcasting on AM in 1918, and later moved to at 89.3 FM. MPR made an offer, and the sale was finalized. The decision was deeply unpopular with a small but dedicated group of WCAL listeners who did not want to see an end to the station's programming and they organized to oppose the sale. The courts rejected their legal challenge.

Meanwhile, speculation swirled that MPR bought WCAL so that it could sell its Twin Cities classical music station, KSJN-FM, and move its classical programming to 89.3. Although that would have been an economic windfall, adding \$25 million or more to the MPR endowment, it would not have moved MPR forward towards its goal of serving the public in a new way or attracting younger audiences.

The MPR Board analyzed the options: Secure the status quo or act ambitiously to expand its community service. Since the earliest days at Saint John's, the answer was always "expand service to the community." What MPR was planning for 89.3 FM had nothing to do with getting out of classical music or even swapping frequencies. Instead, MPR was making a new investment in its musical portfolio, and its decision would alter the Twin Cities music landscape in dramatic ways.

Within weeks, Kling took the microphone on MPR News' *Midday* to declare that MPR would keep the newly purchased WCAL frequency, but that it did not expect to continue classical music programming on it. MPR was still developing its plan for the station, so he was vague on the kind of new format listeners would hear at 89.3 FM.

The big question was what kind of programming would plug MPR into the creativity of the indie music community that was so rich in the Upper Midwest? MPR had connected with that audience in occasional arts features on News and at live events featuring a segment of those artists, but had done so in a small way. People in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota who loved alternative-

rock music and local musicians were forced to search across scattered sources and stations to find it. MPR was about to change that.

Jon McTaggart, MPR's COO, asked Sarah Lutman, then MPR's head of cultural programming, to lead a team that conceived of a completely different broadcast service; one about new music and the lifestyle of the people who listen to it. The team imagined that 89.3 FM, MPR's new third channel, would supplement the existing two MPR channels (News and Classical MPR) and appeal to an audience of mostly younger people who were interested in the vibrant independent music and arts scene in the Twin Cities. This station would engage more artists, more diverse voices, and more local voices. That would be a priority.

What resulted was transformational for the community—and for MPR. The station emerging from these discussions proved to be a startling creation in the organization's history and a notable achievement in public broadcasting.

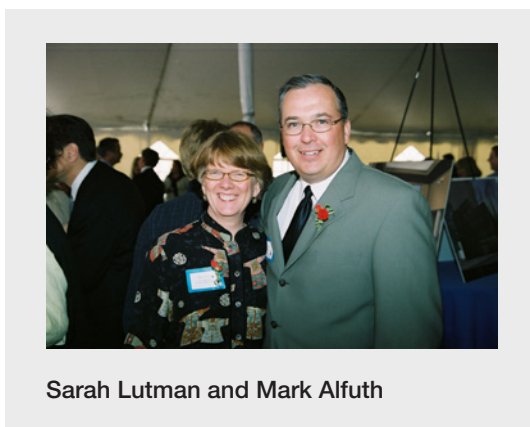
The Current

Two months after buying WCAL, MPR changed the call letters to KCMP, dubbed it “The Current 89.3,” and cued up the first song broadcast in its new format. The song was “Say Shh,” a musical homage to Minnesota, by the local hip-hop group Atmosphere. “I honestly can’t think of a cooler song to pick,” wrote

Star Tribune music critic Chris Riemenschneider. R.T. Rybak, then mayor of Minneapolis, called the launch one of the most important events in the history of music in the community.

Even the station’s name pointed to new horizons. The name of the new station came to Lutman as she ran along the Mississippi River. “The Current” was a nod to the constant flow of the storied body of water that connects Minnesota to so many other legendary musical cities, as well as to the electrical currents and radio frequencies that power the station, and to the constant influx of new music that the station would play.

The Current had a mission unlike that of any other radio station in the region: to help listeners discover their next favorite song or new favorite band, while making connections between independent and alternative artists, local and national, their listeners and their community. “We’re trying to throw away all the preconceptions that most radio stations have of what you can and cannot



Sarah Lutman and Mark Alfuth

play,” said The Current’s first program director, Steve Nelson. “We’re trying to appeal to people who are interested in listening to great music.” There would be no fence posts dividing genres.

Lutman saw The Current as an enormous opportunity. “To be relevant, organizations need to constantly renew. Artists are always making new things and exploring new ideas; they help organizations connect with generative energy and tap into new ideas. Starting The Current was an enormous opportunity to deepen MPR’s connections with artists and to help the organization benefit from artists’ enthusiasms and ideas,” she says.

Essay by

Slug

When The Current went on the air with our song “Say Shh,” I didn’t understand the significance of what was happening. I’d heard chatter about the new radio station, but things are always happening around town, and I had no idea what the implications were or how huge it was going to end up being for me or for the community in general. Stations had come and gone, we had shows and then we didn’t, so in the in the mix of things I didn’t know what it really meant. Somebody even specifically told me that MPR launching a new station was a really big deal, and even then it didn’t sink in. The song is kind of anthemic (I thought it was cute), and it’s about what’s great about Minnesota, so it made sense that they would choose something like that, and it was cool that it was one of our songs. But I think that’s part of why I didn’t get how big of a deal The Current was going to be. We didn’t see ourselves as being a big deal—we were still trying to figure out what our career meant to us. But after a few years passed and people were still talking about the fact that The Current chose our song as the first song, and I saw the hit it was becoming, that’s when I realized that it was a big deal—a huge deal.

“Say Shh” introduced Atmosphere to a lot of people who had

never heard of us before, and that was because of The Current. Not just because it was the first song but because MPR publicized that it way. They created this thing that got us into the ears of people who never would have known to search us out before that. “Say Shh” is a hidden track at the end of “Always Coming Back Home to You,” so it’s possible that MPR even gave it its name. It wasn’t well-known before that. It’s super corny, and it was written from a super corny place. I definitely wasn’t trying to make anything timeless. The idea of it turned out to be bigger than the sum of its parts. Knowing now the life that song received, I wish I’d put more depth into it or at least mentioned Bob Dylan.

When I wrote it I was pissed off at Minnesota, but I didn’t write it from that. I wrote an anthem intentionally because I’d never heard anybody write one about Minnesota. At the time it was all about the act of doing it. I still have lots of positive feelings about this place, and I still have negative feelings about this place. It’s overwhelming how much we are all feeling this right now. But it’s not a new thing—this has been going on here for a really long time. What’s new is that people are confronting it, people are being forced to deal with it. And so in a way, even though it obviously requires more and more tragic events to bring that about, that’s progress. There’s progress going on right now, and I only hope to give energy to continuing it going forward.

So that’s the whole Minnesota community growing and getting more aware of itself. But it’s been happening to me as one person since then too. The very first time I was in the MPR studio, Mary Lucia had us play songs off of You Can’t Imagine How Much Fun

We're Having in 2005, and then she started challenging me, even grilling me, about a song on the album called "Panic Attack," which was opinions I had formed about antidepressants and prescription medication in general. Maybe she didn't see it that way, but I felt like she was coming at me. I wasn't prepared to have somebody challenge my opinions about a song on the air—I didn't even think that could happen. When she did that, it brought me to a new level of awareness about how I have to approach these things. I do still try to stay as off the cuff as possible so I can say what I'm really thinking, but I have to consider how I might feel about this in ten minutes. Because I know this is my opinion right now, but that can evolve. So in the moment I might be feeling passionate about something because it's been a part of the day, but there's always that time when we all get to exhale, and we have to inhale and exhale again, because it's life. Mary Lucia might have been one of the first people to really challenge me like that and I love her for it because I learned a lot. And I will never be speechless like that ever again.



Bob Collins joins Mary Lucia on her show to discuss the news on The Current.

In a bold and remarkable move for a media organization, Lutman authored a blog sharing what was going on behind the scenes as The Current prepared to launch. Unlike most radio format changes that are announced when listeners tune in and discover new music and voices on their favorite frequencies, the blog allowed the audience to witness the shaping of the station, and set the tone for what listeners could come to expect from The Current: An authentic, warm channel that brought the audience close, letting them rate songs, suggest music for an entire day of programming, or through a more conversational approach to delivering the news.

While MPR's early Classical and News teams were mostly young college kids without much radio experience, The Current was able to gather accomplished professionals, including many of the heavyweights of the Twin Cities indie music

scene, to host and run the station.

“I sort of jokingly refer to the time before *The Current* as a kind of radio diaspora,” says Ali Lozoff, a long-time member of the Twin Cities music and arts scene who was hired as the marketing manager in the early days of the station. “There were all these people who had been working

at other radio stations, and now they were either working at crappy radio jobs or weren’t in radio at that point. If you weren’t at a student-run station, or if you wanted to work professionally in alt-rock, there was nothing.”

Lozoff had worked at Radio K, the University of Minnesota’s student-run station, with Steve Nelson, one of the student founders of the station, who had also hosted programs for such beloved but defunct stations as Rev 105 and Zone 105. Nelson believed the region was underserved by indie music stations and there was plenty of room on the radio dial for more choices.

As Program Director at *The Current*, Nelson took advantage of the opportunity of a brand new station with a lot of buzz behind it to cherry-pick the top talent from the area’s best music stations, past and present. Mary Lucia, who had also hosted at Rev 105 and Zone 105, as well as 1500 KSTP, had twice won Minnesota Music Awards. At *The Current*, she gained an even larger following, repeatedly voted best FM radio personality by *City Pages* readers and appreciated for the genuineness of her spontaneous and world-weary but warm voice.

Listeners found another easy-listening voice in Mark Wheat. A native of England, he immersed himself in indie radio from nearly the moment he arrived on American shores in 1983. By 1992 he was in the Twin Cities at KFAI,



Mary Lucia interviews Philip Glass at the Walker Art Center on April 16, 2005.



Mark Wheat triumphantly welcomes musicians to the stage for the Music on a Stick concert at the State Fair. Semisonic, The Jayhawks, Dessa, Jeremy Messersmith, and Lucy Michelle and the Velvet Lapelles performed at the Minnesota State Fair Grandstand on August 31, 2012.

before he went on to Zone 105 and Radio K. When he joined The Current at the station's beginnings in 2005, he hoped the new service could rally the region's indie music listeners who had given up on finding a station built with them in mind. He loves giving a daily shout-out to streaming listeners scattered all over the globe. When Wheat became a U.S. citizen in 2012, he did so partly to deepen his connection to the region's music community.

Bill DeVille, another staffer of The Current since its inception, came to MPR via Cities 97. His encyclopedic knowledge of indie music is especially strong in the roots/Americana genres. One of the shows he hosts, *United States of Americana*, focuses on those varieties of music and has featured Roseanne

Cash, Justin Townes Earle, and other prominent musicians as in-studio guests. DeVille often takes a playful approach to his curation of tunes by presenting them thematically, by year, or by another connecting thread.

Steve Seel had been with Classical MPR since 1999, hosting nationally syndicated shows as well as local shifts. He came aboard at The Current to help launch the new service and tap into his deep love of alternative music. Shortly after the station launched, a new opportunity presented itself that also reflected one of Steve's interests—public affairs.

Policy and a Pint, a partnership with the Citizens League, a non-partisan public policy advocacy group, became a recurring event series focusing on important conversations in an informal space. As host of these events, Seel led conversations for hundreds of engaged community members that featured such speakers as Justice Alan Page, former United States *Comptroller General* David Walker, and many illustrious locally and nationally recognized authors, politicians, professors and policy makers. Along with events like *Rock the Cradle*, *Policy and a Pint*, demonstrated the ways The Current set about differentiating themselves from the typical music station in the market, and created true community engagement.

Jill Riley, an original hire fresh out of college radio at KVSC in Saint Cloud, has appeared throughout the station's daily schedule. She started off doing overnights and evening shifts, but after a few programming changes, she co-hosts *Oake and Riley in the Morning*, along with veteran Minnesota radio host Brian Oake. She also contributes reporting and radio essays on music and contemporary life throughout the day. "You have to think hard about how you approach subjects, because we have a huge responsibility," she says. "That responsibility triples in public radio, and we get instant feedback through social media and email. We feel the pressure to get it right."

Over the years, hosts at The Current like Jade, Mac Wilson, Sean McPherson, and Andrea Swensson also added their voices to the service. The Current became



Andrea Swensson, 2015

a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for people in the indie music industry to be at the start of a new radio service, and to watch a bold experiment unfold.

The Current's eclecticism also embraced the humorous and unpredictable vibe of *The Morning Show*, the beloved program with Jim Ed Poole and Dale Connelly, when the program switched homes from Classical MPR to The Current. They brought their unconventional musical tastes as well as a loyal audience and a wealth of experience producing in-studio performances to the early years of The Current. "Most rock stations have a wacky morning program; ours featured some of the most well-known characters and talented voice-artists in the region, so we were pretty lucky," remembers Lozoff.

In its first week, 62,000 listeners made use of The Current's online stream, an impressive number of online listeners in those days. Folks tuning in online and on air heard a range of artists like Arcade Fire, The Flaming Lips, Wilco, Weezer, the Jayhawks, Neko Case, Haley Bonar, Stevie Wonder, Prince, De La Soul, Ray Charles, Johnny Cash, David Bowie, The Clash, and the Beastie Boys. Clearly there had been a hole in the market, a craving for more of this



Jade in The Current studio, 2015.

music marrying the best of the indie stalwarts with emerging artists.

Some people were skeptical that MPR could find success with a station of this sort. Some MPR staffers also had their doubts. “Even some of us in the newsroom thought, ‘I can’t believe this. Oh my gosh. This ain’t gonna work,’” says *Morning Edition*’s Cathy Wurzer. “It turned out to be brilliant. People love the local music and the vibe that comes off The Current.”

As the new station found its stride, listeners saw clear differences between The Current’s voices and those on commercial stations. The Current’s hosts were free to be themselves on the air, share their feelings, discuss the music they care about, and contribute to the musical programming. “We are encouraged to be really authentic here and to be vulnerable and to share our true feelings,” says Andrea Swensson, host of *The Local Show* and the Local Current blog.

It's sometimes tough to maintain that much openness, especially when a tragedy strikes the music community; Prince's unexpected death is just one example. "You know you have a job to do," Lucia says, "and yet being as authentic as you can be means you're going to be grieving on the air, maybe crying on the air, reaching out to people who

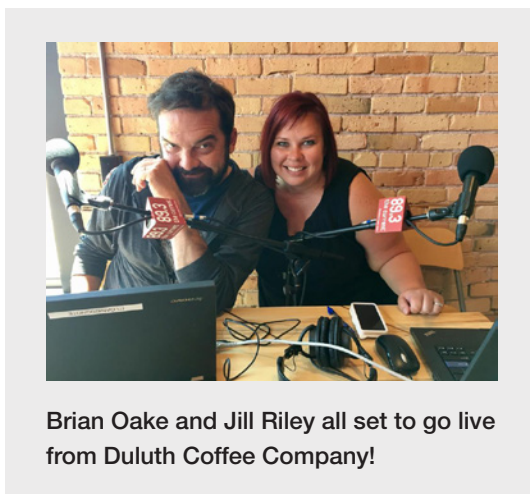
are feeling the same way you are. But we're still trying to steer the ship, and it's an odd combination of trying to balance your own personal feelings with doing the job."

Maintaining that balance, and being such public figures, are substantial responsibilities and challenges that The Current's staff accepts. "You're speaking to a lot of people, and you can touch one person's life in a personal way," says Riley. "There's an awesome power in that."

The Current's close association with local musical artists and concert venues like First Avenue was exciting. "At the beginning, it was hard to believe a music station could really contribute to a community's cultural life. But I thought, 'we can do this,'" Wheat says. "This is a cool town. I believed in the local music scene, and I knew we could help develop artists—not just from Minnesota, but from other places. For me, this has been a dream come true."

Artists coming to the region to play a show, along with their fan base, learned that The Current was the station that would support them, would help make their presence a great experience for everyone, and would send them off with good memories. Suddenly alternative music was not so obscure.

The station's effect on the Twin Cities music community was immediate. Music stores reported sales jumps for recordings by the bands that appeared



Brian Oake and Jill Riley all set to go live from Duluth Coffee Company!



Chastity Brown performs at the MPR booth at the Minnesota State Fair, 2012.

on The Current's playlist, First Avenue had its busiest spring season in years, and the pride of the region's musicians soared. Bands were getting their music played and actually getting results in the market; people were buying tickets for their shows and bands were selling out in the Twin Cities when they couldn't sell out in their own hometowns. Even the legendary Prince became an immediate fan and supporter offering exclusive appearances and music to The Current.

Essay by

Chastity Brown

*I've lived in Minneapolis for about eleven years. In that time, I put out five albums as a singer-songwriter, and my sixth will be released soon. I submitted most of those albums to The Current in hopes of getting a bit of play over the years. Thankfully they didn't take the bait until I released my fifth album, *Back-Road Highways*. This was the first album in which I was able to meld my influences into a more cohesive sound. It also marked the point in my life where I finally accepted what I sound like. Up until that time, I was conflicted with what it meant to live in two different worlds as a biracial woman who is both black and white, and who is now making a home in a northern city, but was raised in the rural south. What I create is a direct embodiment of how I exist in life, and it wasn't until *Back-Road Highways* that this clarification of self solidified in my work. Without making any of these proclamations to The Current, their staff heard something unique in the songs and began spinning my single, "After You" in 2012. Within a matter of months, I started seeing more than just my friends at my concerts in the Minneapolis area.*

I remember two specific things that the station did which gave my music a national audience. First, there was a music exchange

with an affiliate station in Philadelphia, which perked some ears in the music world out east. After that, I was lucky enough to have music critic, Andrea Swensson spotlight my studio recording of “After You” in a “Promising New Voice” feature, which appeared on NPR’s homepage. Consequently, I started receiving booking inquiries from venues in Los Angeles, Portland, Pennsylvania, and—the one that excited me the most—from The Apollo Theater in Harlem. They’d asked me to be apart of their emerging artists series. When I asked the director how they heard about me, she said that a friend of hers had heard a track of mine on the radio. It was the same track—“After You”—that The Current had started playing earlier that year. Recalling my first experience at The Apollo is no small thing . . . meeting their historian, affectionately named Mr. Apollo (aka Billy Mitchell), and being led throughout the venue’s backstage and underbelly where the names—some handwritten by the artist themselves—of the greats cover the walls: James Brown, Stevie Wonder, and Ella Fitzgerald (her first time singing in public was on The Apollo’s stage) . . .

*In the following months, “After You” got picked up by HBO and BBC to appear in a film titled *Mary and Martha*, starring Hillary Swank. The film came out while I was on tour in the UK and had a tremendous impact on the volume of folks coming to hear me: this unknown folk-soul singing, proud Afro-wearing woman based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Eventually this radio support, my touring, and my badass publicist in the UK, led me to the set of *Later* . . . with Jools Holland, where I shared two of my new songs in front of a national television audience for the first time. Another moment I*

won't forget.

I credit a portion of the good things that have come my way to The Current. The music business feels like being in a whirlwind at times, making it difficult to hold on to a fixed point while trying to move my career. When The Current started to spin my songs is one of those fixed points . . . one of those moments we artists secretly hunger for, a moment of “we see you, we hear you, and we like what you’re doing, so keep doing the damn thing.” I’m forever grateful for that.



Bill DeVille and Minnesota singer/songwriter Ben Weaver trek across a frozen lake in the Boundary Waters Wilderness Area. The two, along with MPR photographer Nate Ryan, journeyed up north to visit explorers and educators Dave and Amy Freeman, who were spending a year living in the Boundary Waters to raise awareness about the wilderness area.

From the start, *The Current* conveyed a sense of freedom. In return, listeners were willing to accept that they might not always love the song currently playing but that they'd love the next one. Few other radio markets had a station like this.

"I've lived in New York and Boston, and I hear from people in both cities, and even though they're really great places to live, they have zero in terms of radio," says Lucia. But there's hope for people outside the radio broadcast area: online streaming gives *The Current* an international audience. "I'm still always stunned when somebody in Brooklyn tells me this is the best radio station they've ever heard," she adds.

Although *The Current* immediately drew listeners, it took several years to hit its stride. Pivotal in this growth was the 2009 arrival of Jim McGuinn as the new Program Director. Together with David Safar as Music Director and Lindsay Kimball as Assistant Program Director, McGuinn created what has become the special format for *The Current*. Together they worked out how large and broad the music discovery was going to be, how frequently to repeat songs, and how often to feature a local artist.

Jim McGuinn had previously worked for the firm that managed the career of James Brown, had done a stint as a music industry educator, and had years in commercial and noncommercial radio. He was already well aware of the legendary music scene in Minnesota. While at indie station WXPB in Philadelphia, he heard that *The Current* was searching for a program director. “I thought that *The Current* was already the most innovative radio station in North America, and I jumped at the chance to be part of that and help write the next chapter,” he says. “And when I arrived, I noticed that local businesses had *The Current* on more than I’d ever seen for a station so progressive, challenging, and forward thinking. I knew immediately this was a station with strong connections with the audience.”

Over the years, McGuinn and the rest of the team have worked to deepen that connection with the listeners and with artists in the community. “Increasingly we’re viewed as one of the most important music stations nationally that helps launch new artists,” he says. *The Current*, for instance, was the first station in North America to play music by the band Mumford & Sons, which went on to sell more than ten million records. That influence is especially valuable in the Midwest, which doesn’t have an enormous music infrastructure or scouts at every show trying to find the next big thing.

“*The Current* has made it possible for me to reach a wider audience, something that independent musicians really struggle to do otherwise,” says Dessa, an artist who has built a large following through *The Current*. “As an



Dessa performs at the Fitzgerald Theater on June 22, 2013.

indie artist, to have access to that many ears is indispensable.” From the start, The Current has championed young and unsigned musicians in the Twin Cities. It’s even helped Dessa herself make musical discoveries. She remembers sitting in her car listening to The Current in awe, hearing Zoo Animal, a Twin Cities–based band, for the first time. She has since become a big fan of their work, even asking them to share the stage with her.

“From leading local acts like Trampled by Turtles, Jeremy Messersmith, and Chastity Brown, not to mention tomorrow’s next great band, The Current has been proud to play a role in furthering the careers of artists,” McGuinn says.

When touring artists stop by the station during a busy tour, their eyes often widen soon after they enter MPR’s broadcast center for an in-studio recording. They unpack their gear in a world-class recording facility, one in



Mike Demark operating the control board in Maud Moon Weyerhauser Studio, 2014.

which some of the greatest musicians have performed. “Nowadays most kids are making music on laptops in their bedroom,” says Mark Wheat. “Here they get a chance to record in a fantastic facility. That’s priceless, and you can see it in their eyes. It’s exactly what public radio should be doing.” After their first experience, the artists go out of their way to return to the recording facilities that MPR supporters have built over the past five decades.

From the start, The Current made a commitment to feature local and regional artists every hour. Promoting bands, concerts and venues—the station became the place for people who like to discover new sounds and dig deeply into the history of popular and independent music.

Had The Current really achieved MPR’s goals in drawing a new crowd to public media? “If someone said, ‘We need you to create a radio station where 15-year-olds can listen along with their 50-year-old parents,’ everyone would think, ‘That’s crazy—it doesn’t happen,’” Wheat says.

But it did happen, and the audience quickly grew in The Current’s first weeks.



Charles Bradley prepares with his pianist ahead of his in-studio session for *The Current* in the Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Studio in 2013.

“Their first scheduled membership drive is in late February,” Reimenschneider wrote in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* during the station’s opening days. “That’s when we’ll really find out how many clowns like us are out there.” There were a lot of them. The first membership drive following the launch of *The Current* far exceeded its goals in terms of new members, the number of people making contributions, and money raised.

A large acrylic sheet hanging outside *The Current*’s studios also testifies to the support of listeners to the new station. It displays the names of more than 6,000 contributors—all the founding members of *The Current*. That early support spoke to the enthusiasm listeners felt for the station they heard taking shape, even though they didn’t yet know what it would grow to be.

Deadly Serious and Completely Playful

By the late 2000s, The Current was growing into an influential force in Minnesota music—a phenomenon that played an essential role in building the careers of many artists, adding to the region’s creative economy.

Part of that success can be traced to collaborations between

The Current and other area arts organizations. Since 2008, The Current has co-produced Rock the Garden with the Walker Art Center. Launched by the Walker in 1998, tickets to the annual music festival often sell out in minutes. Rock the Cradle, The Current’s annual free, no-ticket-required event, allows kids and their grownups to explore music, art and culture at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. During a typical year, The Current sponsors about 200 shows at clubs and theaters around the region, directly engaging musicians and audiences. These events showcase how The Current has used events to help build one of the strongest local music scenes in the country.

There’s no question that The Current opened MPR to new generations and more diverse audiences. It’s a shared experience between musicians, their friends and families, and their fans. “Our approach to music has been to be deadly serious about our work and also to be completely playful. Music is such an emotional thing,” McGuinn says. “Here’s a station that joins you in your living



Valerie June performs at Rock the Garden, 2014.



Belle and Sebastian perform for a sold out crowd at Rock The Garden at the Walker Art Center on June 20, 2015.

room or sits next to you in your car every day, bringing along a stack of records to play for you. The Current is the listener’s companion on that journey.” “It’s kind of like an ongoing adventure through the changing landscape of media and music,” Safar says. “And we’ve evolved with it.”



jeremy messersmith, PaviElla, Chastity Brown, Cameron Kinghorn and Chis Koza sing “Little Blue World” in Maud-Moon Weyerhauser Studio.



John Hermanson, Erik Berry, Zach Scanlan, Eamonn McLain and John Munson in Maud-Moon Weyerhauser Studio recording Little Blue World.

Little Blue World

Jeremy Messersmith

INTRO
D

V1
D G D A D

8 G D/A A D **V2/V3**
D G D A

15 D G D/A A D D/C# **CH1/CH2**
Bm G D

22 A Bm G D Bm G A D

INST. V
29 D G D A D G D A D D/C#

CH3
37 Bm G D A Bm G D/A A

CH4 *Fade to only vocals*
45 Bm G D A Bm G D Bm G A

TAG
53 D Bm G A D Bm G A D Bm G A D Bm G A D

V1:
There's time for adventure
There's people to treasure
And moments that no one can hold
There's so much to see
When you're wandering free
On this little blue world we call home

V2:
There's rivers and canyons
There's cornfields and badlands
And stories that haven't been told
There's thunder and lightning
There's room for surprise
On this little blue world we call home

CHORUS:
Home
We call home
The only one we've ever known
Home
We call home
Drifting alone on this little blue world we call home

V3:
We'll chase the horizon
The sun in our eyes
And we'll learn so much more than we know
With songs in our hearts
We'll travel the stars
In this little blue world we call home

Little Blue World, written for MPR's 50th anniversary by Minnesota-based singer/songwriter jeremy messersmith. This song was written in the spirit of a sing-a-long. The audience is encouraged to record and share their versions as well.

Two-Way Radio

Even before the launch of *The Current*, MPR's 55,000-square-foot broadcast center in downtown Saint Paul had become crowded. The organization had outgrown its 1980-expanded and remodeled building on the corner of Cedar and West Seventh, and had scattered many of its nearly 270 employees to nearby office buildings and the MPR-owned Fitzgerald Theater. It became necessary to move or to expand again.

The need for additional space ignited a rethinking of MPR's identity, working style, capabilities, and public image. The organization needed a home that would let MPR best use its creative talent. It followed an uncertain course on the way to its solution: MPR had to decide whether to remain in Saint Paul, or relocate to obtain the necessary space.

The challenge was addressed through an extensive process lead by Chief Operating Officer Jon McTaggart along with General Counsel Tom Kigin and Chief Technology Officer Don Creighton, and involved many MPR board members and employees. The group examined 25 potential Twin Cities sites, including Block E in downtown Minneapolis, the Young Quinlan building at 9th and Nicollet and other prime locations in Minneapolis, various places in the first-ring suburbs, and the Saint Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority building at 480 Cedar, one block north of the existing MPR broadcast center.

The study included a review of MPR's constituents, program participants, employee residence locations, and nearby amenities in music and print media. Nearly all the signs pointed to a new location in Minneapolis. MPR entered into negotiations for a stellar location in the heart of that city. But as those

negotiations neared completion, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and market jitters caused the building's owner to reconsider the sale and MPR to question its ability to raise the required funds. The deal ended by mutual agreement.

Under the changed circumstances, expanding MPR's headquarters into the property next to its current space made the most sense. Incentives offered by organizations and individuals with a vested interest in promoting the business health of downtown Saint Paul, including The Saint Paul Foundation and its president Paul Verret, continued their advocacy for MPR in St. Paul. Their efforts helped convince the MPR board and leaders that staying in the current Saint Paul location made sense, adapted to fit MPR's needs with expansion and changes to the existing structure.

This approach meant that it would be necessary for MPR to acquire the Housing and Redevelopment Authority building across the street from its broadcast center and to close 9th Street at Cedar Street. MPR met with the Saint Paul City Council to explain these necessary parts of the plan, and the city gave its approval.

When the expansion was approved, work began on the design of the new facility by local architecture, engineering, and planning firm HGA. Designed by architect Bill Blanski, the newly expanded broadcast center would have nearly 130,000 square feet of space, bringing all Saint Paul-based staff together for the first time in years.

The facility design contained both practical and symbolic attributes. A bright and airy atrium would unite the old building with the new. A new meeting space, the UBS Forum, was designed on the top floor for both internal gatherings and public events. It now serves as the largest recording space in the building, allowing for live broadcasts of events such as mayoral debates, in-studio performances and panel discussions with a studio audience of up to 140 people. Multiple public spaces and meeting rooms would break down the concept of radio as a one-way medium. The building's analog wiring, state of



Evening lights from the Kling Public Media Center.

the art in when it was installed in 1980, would be replaced by an audio-over-IP distribution system, the new standard.

Home to both MPR and APM headquarters, the facility would also house the backbone of Minnesota’s Amber Alert system, the emergency alert system, and the back-up technical operations center for all NPR systems. Those NPR systems would automatically switch the national network “live” operation to MPR in the event of a catastrophic failure of NPR’s own broadcast system.

The expanded building, later renamed by the MPR Board as the Kling Public Media Center, serves as a model for a recording, production and broadcast facility that is continuously updated to meet the needs of its staff and to adapt to the latest media technologies to better serve regional and national audiences and engage the community.

Rise and Fall in Florida

In 2007, the parent organization of MPR, now known as American Public Media Group (APMG or APM Group), was presented with an opportunity to serve listeners in Florida, the winter home of many loyal Minnesota listeners. It was a venture born of opportunity and urgency. Public Radio Capital (now Public Media Co.), which acquires and preserves public radio frequencies for community use, contacted APMG regarding a rare opportunity: a station owned by a religious broadcaster near Miami, then the largest major market without a classical music station, was for sale.

Public Radio Capital had already negotiated a purchase price from owner Trinity Broadcasting, but the deal required a public radio organization to complete the purchase. APMG recognized the potential for a large audience for classical music in that region, so it cautiously agreed to buy the station, despite the unusual circumstance in which the financial details of the deal had been pre-determined.

In the final months of 2007, the climate seemed right to make the investment in Florida. The stock market was high, unemployment was low, the housing market was on fire in Florida, and few people believed a serious recession was on the horizon. APMG's purchase of the station came at exactly the wrong time. Housing in the region had been overbuilt and, when the "Great Recession" hit just months after the purchase was completed, the local economy fell into an even "Greater Recession." Soon there would be 60,000 condominiums sitting vacant in Miami alone.

Based on its success building solid public radio networks in Minnesota and

Southern California, APMG bought three more stations in Palm Beach, Vero Beach and Naples, Florida, and moved forward with launching Classical South Florida (CSF), a new non-profit organization as the home of a new public radio network—all part of an effort to bring classical music to a new region.

The APMG and MPR boards were optimistic about the prospects for South Florida. “It was a marketplace with a real need for the service we provide,” says MPR Board Member Susan Boren. “We hoped that by establishing a station in a primarily Hispanic marketplace, we could learn a great deal and might get some talent that would help diversify the team throughout our organization.”

Unfortunately, the recession scrambled the financial forecast for Classical South Florida. Lots of people were listening to the new network, but it attracted modest support from individual donors and members there, significantly less than classical music stations elsewhere in the country. Even though Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Naples, and Fort Myers were all vibrant places for the arts, and home to large numbers of classical music fans, supporting members and donors didn’t adopt the new service fast enough to make it financially viable.

Perhaps the biggest difference between MPR’s successes in California or Minnesota and the situation in Florida was that a local board of trustees, a key part of any public radio organization, was not established before the purchase was complete. While there were some heroic efforts by its Florida leaders and members, the CSF board and local management could not overcome the significant economic and organizational challenges during that turbulent time.

For several years, CSF struggled to find members, raise enough money, and establish a sense of community among listeners. In 2015, APMG sold the stations. Despite the venture’s disappointing end, APMG learned much from its southern expansion. Hundreds of thousands of listeners in South Florida had benefited from CSF for almost eight years, and the trustees, staff, and advisory board had worked hard to support it.

Florida listeners were not left without access to classical music. Not long after the sale of the Classical South Florida stations, APM launched a new, national classical music web based site called YourClassical, a collection of streams and programs designed around lifestyle and activity, and offering all of the national classical programs that APM distributes. Classical music lovers around the nation could select from curated collections, programs, and features available on line at yourclassical.org.

Breaking News and Bringing Communities Together

While *The Current* was breaking new ground and drawing in new listeners, MPR's news operation was evolving, too. The growth of news content delivered digitally online and via social media was changing the business of journalism. It enabled people to share news, call it up at will, and develop a new sense of ownership in the news around them.

Some prognosticators warned that these trends would weaken news reporting by traditional media. Instead, MPR saw its news gathering activities and influence strengthen. In 2009, MPR hosted a lively online and in-person discussion titled "The Future of News." The event attracted more than 1,500 participants, including a former U.S. vice president, Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) board members, newspaper publishers, foundation leaders, Los Angeles media leaders, the senior executives and CEOs of NPR, PBS, and WNYC, journalism school academics and news research institutes.

The conference participants built a consensus: "Do what you do best," one participant declared, "and link to the rest." The general conclusion was that journalists were declining at an alarming rate as newspapers cut back. Public media had a major role to play in filling that void and content collection and creation was a key role for public media. To do this, public media needed more reporters.

MPR had a deep history of filling that void. When big events happened, large numbers of listeners turned to MPR.

In 2002, U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone's plane crashed in Eveleth, killing him, his wife, Sheila Wellstone, and his daughter, Marcia, along with campaign



On the eve of the 2002 election, U.S. Senate candidates Norm Coleman (R) and Walter Mondale (D) had their first and only debate, moderated by Gary Eichten and Paul Magers. Mondale had joined the race in response to Paul Wellstone's unexpected death 10 days prior. (November 4, 2002)

staff and the pilots. MPR political reporter Mark Zdechlik was on his way to Duluth to cover a debate when the news broke. “At about 10:00 in the morning I got a call that something might be going on,” he remembers. “So I went to the airport in Eveleth, in the freezing rain and snow. I got an airport staff person to take me up in a plane in the not-so-good weather.”

Circling the crash site at low altitude, Zdechlik reported on the burning remains of the plane. That was the beginning of continuous coverage of the crash that emerged from MPR’s newsroom in the following weeks. Listeners depended on that coverage to make sense of the tragedy, to cover the political fall-out that followed, and to help them grieve the Senator through stories and voices of other Minnesotans—including those of the surviving Wellstone children David and Mark.

On August 1, 2007, the MPR newsroom was near the close of an already



Tom Crann, host of All Things Considered, MPR News, 2015

busy day. During the evening rush hour, when many MPR listeners were on their daily commute, the staff learned of the catastrophic collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis. Several MPR reporters, including Dan Olson and Cathy Wurzer, were in their cars close to the scene and called in eyewitness accounts of the tragedy. From there, the newsroom went into high gear and delivered live coverage for hours.

MPR reporters still recall Olson's poetic on-scene reports. "It was unbelievable," remembers MPR news host Tom Crann. "We were amazed that Dan could pull that off live, off the top of his head, describing what he's seeing and the mood of the people on the bridge, and how much we did and didn't know."

MPR's coverage continued live and continuously for 48 hours, and some reporters worked on it for ten consecutive days. The story remained active in MPR's newsroom for more than a year, as reporters told the stories of those who survived and those who didn't, the emotional helicopter inspection of the scene by President George W. Bush, the removal of the wreckage, inspectors' reports

on the condition of the bridge, and many other aspects of the aftermath.

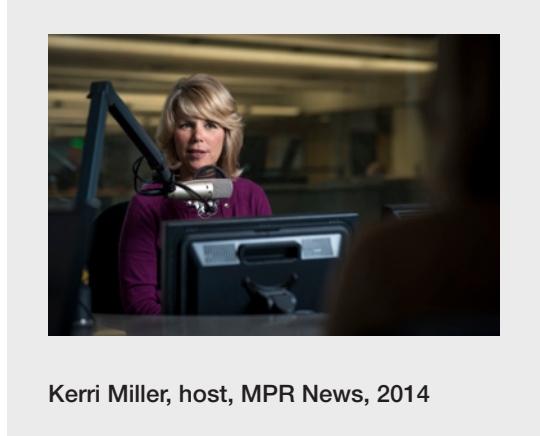
The shock of the MPR reporters came through in those stories. “I remember thinking that I’m seeing these massive girders from the bridge bent into shapes they’re never supposed to be bent into, and I wondered how anybody could have

survived that,” says reporter Brandt Williams, who was on the scene. “Also seeing the look on President Bush’s face when he was up close for the first time.”

For Williams, as well as for many in the newsroom, such moments are what made him fall in love with working at MPR. Unguarded moments with important and influential people, times of sobering solemnity, the coming together of communities—they all resonate with the presenters of the news and with listeners.

That engagement with listeners continues to set MPR apart. By 2017, MPR achieved what previously seemed unthinkable: *Morning Edition* on MPR, hosted by Cathy Wurzer, became the number one-rated radio program in the Twin Cities with the largest audience of any radio broadcaster, commercial or non-commercial.

That accomplishment, along with many others, would confirm Saint John’s University President Colman Barry’s 1980 comment, “Sometimes dreams come true...” Father Colman closely followed MPR’s progress and evolution over the years, even as he moved on to teach at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. before returning to Saint John’s in 1977. He witnessed the opening of MPR’s headquarters in 1980, while spending much time at Abbey missions and other institutions overseas. When he died in 1994, Father Colman was proud of the values of MPR programming and was happily astonished by how influential



Kerri Miller, host, MPR News, 2014



Cathy Wurzer and Jim Bickal prepare for an MPR News remote segment at the Family Table Restaurant in Decorah, IA.

and essential his broadcasting creation was becoming to the lives of listeners as the century ended.

Essay by

Cathy Wurzer

My mother loves to tell the story of how I stood at the top of the driveway that dips down to the family cabin on the North Shore, whooping and hollering, after driving nearly three hours with news that I had just been offered a job at Minnesota Public Radio. Mind you, my parents had no idea what that meant. They were happy that I was happy and trust me, I was thrilled. MPR was—and still is—the gold standard in broadcast journalism and a place where the art of audio storytelling is revered and celebrated. The walls throughout the building are populated with national awards for various programs and news documentaries done by talented storytellers like Mark Heistad, John Biewen and Dan Olson and many others.

Crafting documentaries was not what I was hired to do. Cranking out newscasts was the task as the Morning Edition newscaster for KSJN-AM, the Twin Cities based news station for the fledgling MPR regional network. We had a small news staff back then, small and scrappy as we tried to compete with larger stations that had deeper pockets. Our morning newsgathering consisted of constantly checking the Associated Press wire machines, re-writing that news copy, tracking down the phone numbers of newsmakers

to wake them up for phone interviews and running the taped stories left by our reporters. It was not glamorous, but it was great fun.

*That job was the beginning of my tenure at MPR, a career largely conducted in a sound-proof, dimly lit studio in the pre-dawn dark while everyone else is still sleeping or struggling to start their day. Concerned and curious listeners always want to know when I sleep. The answer is a joking “When I have time.” What carries me through the physical and mental fatigue is knowing listeners **are** out there, depending on us to tell them what is happening in the world and in their community, counting on us to be informative and not inflammatory. Sure, there are web metrics and radio ratings to measure audience numbers, but the notes listeners send truly reflect the impact we have, especially as they long to feel connected in a disconnected and chaotic world.*

While there have been changes in call letters and frequencies, managers and technologies, the task remains the same: telling the truest story possible with accuracy and integrity. That is why I became a journalist and I have always been grateful that MPR has been the best place to practice that kind of journalism.

There is a quote on my desk from Garrison Keillor who wrote, “The early morning people are the soul of radio . . .” I like that. Morning radio has always been the most important time in a broadcast day because, traditionally, that is when the most listeners tune in. I’m not sure if the Morning Edition crew is the soul of what has become such a large and successful organization, but I’d like to think Morning Edition is the heart of what MPR News is all about.

CHAPTER 5



Constantly Changing

The arrival of a new century brought new changes and new challenges to the story of Minnesota Public Radio.

MPR continued to look forward, to talk with its listeners, and to explore new and better ways to inspire, inform and educate. While much had been accomplished, possibilities were beckoning to the creative and risk-taking entrepreneurs woven into the fabric of MPR.

The huge potential inherent in the changing media environment could be daunting. Users and creators alike, including MPR and APM, struggled to remain relevant and influential in a world where digital media allows vast new opportunities for distribution and disaggregation of content. Foundational questions quickly emerged: How important is the “trusted brand” of traditional media? How are media consumption patterns changing? How can MPR most effectively continue increasing its impact and value?

Such challenges aren’t new. MPR has faced defining moments throughout its history, including similar questions about how it would serve its listeners. Initially, MPR offered a single radio source that broadcast a wide range of programming: classical music, news, public affairs programs, and other cultural offerings. In those early years, listeners could go to one station to find many things. During the 1980s, MPR divided into music and news stations, enabling listeners to find many riches but in different places. The audience could grow,

absorbed by the deep specialty of one station to the exclusion of the other. In response, MPR entered a multi-channeled world decades before many other media providers.

Today's digital audiences can hear all the news, music, and other cultural entertainment and information they want in rewarding depth, but they have to search for it—they have to avoid the firehose of other digital resources. That's unlike the environment of MPR's founding years and its single source, "when the inevitable variety of the mix of news and music provided opportunity for discovery and enlightenment, much like standing on the corner and watching a truly diverse parade of people go by," Michael Barone says.

More Support for Music Education

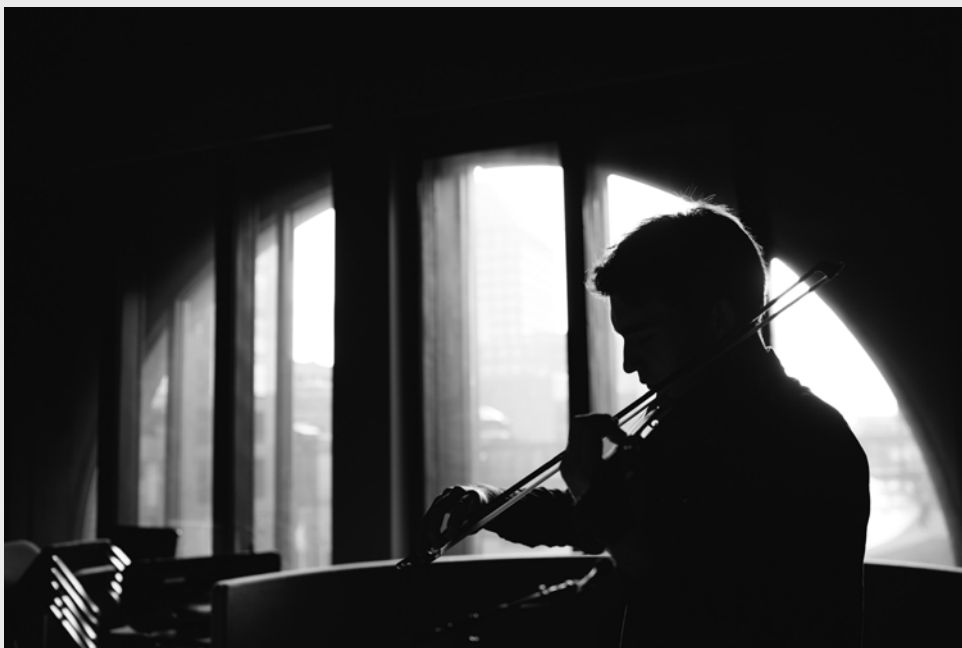
Early in its history, MPR made a decision to invest in education—an unsurprising choice given its original name, Minnesota Education Radio, and its early innovations like Radio Talking Book.

Throughout the years, as cutbacks in school arts budgets have become more widespread and understanding of the impact of an arts education has on a child’s life has become more understood, MPR has invested more and more in programs designed to assist teachers and schools with a music education curriculum. This investment began in the 1980s; in recent years, with advances in digital platforms, education has become an expanding focus of the Classical MPR team.

“We’ve been innovating with ways to make music relevant to kids with a portfolio we call Music for Learning,” says Brian Newhouse. “We’re putting a collection of music education assets in front of teachers all across the region.” The resources include curricula, lesson plans, informational videos, classroom artists, special concerts featuring young musicians, access to used instruments, and a blog that highlights music education news.

“We do that for the mission of MPR,” Newhouse says. “We know those children are our future audience. And we see many teachers feel more and more stressed by resource drain, and they don’t have the time and expertise to teach music. We offer them value to take advantage of. It’s all a way for us to have a helpful influence and encourage audience development, too.”

Even more focused on listener engagement is *Minnesota Varsity*, a classical music competition like no other. Launched in 2011, *Minnesota Varsity* invites



Violinist Alexi Kenney, a Young Artist in Residence from California, performs for Performance Today in 2015, in the Maud Moon Weyerhauser Studio. Performance Today's Young Artists in Residence series invites musicians from the top American conservatories to visit the PT studios for a week-long residency.

high-achieving high school musicians and composers from around Minnesota submit homemade recordings of one of their performances. Each entrant, about 100 per year, receives a page on MPR's website. A team of judges narrows the pool of entrants down to fifteen semifinalists. From this group emerges a group of finalists—including one chosen by popular vote online—all of whom play in a showcase concert at the Fitzgerald Theater in Saint Paul.

For Classical MPR, *Minnesota Varsity* has been a way to serve and inspire accomplished young musicians, giving them an online community and following, while attracting the interest of their teachers, friends, and families. The program has also drawn the attention of a group of devoted sponsors and supporters



Pianist Emanuel Ax and Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä take in applause at Osmo Vänskä's Farewell Concert on November 7, 2013.

who help provide scholarships and funding for the *Minnesota Varsity* show.

For the finalists themselves, the *Minnesota Varsity* experience is unforgettable. How common is it for talented students to come into a state-of-the-art facility and record a piece they love? *Minnesota Varsity* artists get this chance, which few of them have had before. Composers are matched with a mentoring professional composer through American Composers Forum. Hearing their compositions played by real performers is far more revealing (and exciting) than hearing it synthesized on a computer.

The bond between these musicians and MPR lasts. “It is the first place where my love of music was cultivated,” notes *Minnesota Varsity* violinist entrant Julian Maddox. “Being able to come to the place where it started, sharing the love of music that it helped me start, as well as just being in that environment, speaks volumes to me that I can be a part of what means so much to me.”

Minnesota Varsity artists have gone on to attend music conservatories, perform with regional orchestras, teach music, tour the world with musical ensembles, and hear their compositions performed by accomplished musicians.



Christine Sweet with Six Appeal performing at Harmony in the Park at Minnehaha Falls in 2014. —(L to R) Reuben Hushagen, Jordan Roll, Jonathan Thalmann, Michael Brookens, Andrew “Berko” Berkowitz, Trey Jones

Just as important, they’ve forged a lifelong connection with MPR and its listeners.

Essay by

Osmo Vänskä

On the occasion of Minnesota Public Radio's 50th Anniversary, I have fond memories of the Minnesota Orchestra/Minnesota Public Radio mutual and ideal relationship. Upon arriving for my first engagement with the Minnesota Orchestra in 2000, I was impressed to learn of the Orchestra's ongoing live radio broadcast series on Friday evenings across Minnesota as well as delayed broadcasts with a reach both domestically as well as internationally. The Minnesota Orchestra is able to reach more listeners through MPR and in turn, MPR has a direct connection with listeners through a world-class orchestra.

While MPR's home is here in the Twin Cities, it operates at an international level, producing programs and broadcasts extending across the United States and Europe. I believe that MPR is proud of the Minnesota Orchestra as we are proud of them, our remarkable media partner. We are fortunate to have such a long, legendary history of radio broadcasts and it continues, as strong as ever, today.

We have had countless adventures with MPR on the road, sharing special and personal connections marking significant moments in the Minnesota Orchestra's history while on tour. From my very first European Tour with the Orchestra in 2004, MPR was

with us to broadcast a special evening from Sibelius Hall in Lahti, Finland for our final concert of the tour. In the summer of 2006, MPR joined the Orchestra for our debut performances at the BBC Proms, broadcasting live from Royal Albert Hall in London where we presented Mahler Symphony No. 5. During a 2009 winter European tour, MPR aired live from London's Barbican Centre with Joshua Bell. In the summer of 2010 as the Orchestra returned to the BBC Proms in London, MPR was there to broadcast our two concerts, including Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 and our momentous concert of Beethoven Symphony No. 9. We were collectively thrilled to send these historical performances back to Minnesota for all to share in the excitement. MPR has been there for each of the international tours the Orchestra and I have embarked on. The Orchestra made history in May 2015 being the first major American orchestra to perform in Cuba following a thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations and MPR was along to document this historic occasion, broadcasting both of our concerts from the Teatro Nacional in Havana. And most recently, MPR met the Orchestra in Amsterdam during our 2016 festivals tour, broadcasting from the world-renowned Royal Concertgebouw concert hall.

We are fortunate to have a long, rich history of continuing radio broadcasts with Minnesota Public Radio, allowing the Orchestra to be well recognized regionally throughout Minnesota, nationally in the United States and internationally via the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), maintaining a presence on the musical map. This is significant, especially when so many orchestras have lost such ongoing radio broadcast presence.

Outside of Boston Symphony Orchestra, ours is the longest live radio broadcast series with MPR and that is of great significance. Access to our concerts via MPR broadcasts has an enormous reach and affords us a position on the musical pulse in the world. Minnesota Public Radio has also contributed to the Orchestra's investment in new music through our annual Composer Institute, where we prepare and perform select young composers' new works culminating in a full concert that MPR hosts as well as broadcasts. Finally, MPR News has covered the Minnesota Orchestra's activities and special projects for decades, serving as an important media outlet for sharing our story.

As we celebrate Minnesota Public Radio's golden anniversary, I salute the many achievements and contributions to Minnesota and beyond and I look forward to the Minnesota Orchestra/MPR relationship continuing for another fifty years ahead!

Collaboration and Trust, Depth and Breadth

A unique, lifelong connection links MPR News and its listeners, and the digital age has strengthened those bonds. MPR's reporters achieve this through innovative and compelling storytelling.

While reporting on a proposed 2012 Minnesota state constitutional amendment that would have banned gay marriage in Minnesota in 2012, Sasha Aslanian, veteran MPR reporter, used the Public Insight Network (PIN) to ask how families were discussing the issue.

One response was from a woman who grew up in a Catholic family in Minneapolis. She was in a long-term relationship with a woman and hadn't invited her family to their commitment ceremony because she thought they would disapprove. She admitted to Aslanian that she was afraid to even ask her family how they would vote on the amendment. With permission, Aslanian sat down with almost all of the woman's siblings to ask that very question. "That became the thread of the story—this woman and her siblings—and I thought it was fascinating that she was willing to let MPR this far into a really intimate area of her life," Aslanian remembers. "She let us ask, on the air, something she hadn't dared talk about herself."

Like the woman in Aslanian's story, listeners and people affected by the news see MPR News as a different kind of news platform. Journalistic trust combines with the intimacy of radio to make audiences feel they're a part of the reporting and can rely on it. MPR's news operation is a part of the region's community—in some parts of the region there is no other independent news source—and a part of the everyday lives of listeners.

Reporter Brandt Williams has also experienced this trust when covering stories in Minneapolis. Going door to door to interview residents about a crime or disturbing event, he finds that interviewees across racial lines will open up to him. They tell him, “Oh, yeah—Minnesota Public Radio. I’m glad you guys are here.” He can sense their trust when he introduces himself. Much of that trust comes from bringing different voices into stories, which in turn attracts different listeners. Whatever listeners feel about MPR reporters and their stories, social media gives newspeople instant responses, and MPR’s staff pays attention to them. MPR is always getting feedback and challenges from listeners and responding accordingly.

Reporting rich in details and depth wasn’t new to MPR. The blossoming of documentary and long-form journalism that began in the 1990s has continued at MPR. Although many other news organizations are cutting back on their investigative reporting, a kind of journalism critical to the accountability of democratic institutions, MPR is pouring it on. With his team, Chris Worthington, the former managing editor of MPR News and now the managing editor of American Public Media’s investigative reporting and radio documentary unit APM Reports, recognizes there’s no shortage of topics that merit in-depth treatment. Some recent examples include *NASA’s Human Computers*, about the African American mathematics geniuses who made the space program possible; *Betrayed by Silence*, about sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis; (a project from MPR News; many who worked on it are now working for APM Reports), and *In the Dark*, an acclaimed examination of the way law enforcement investigated the Jacob Wetterling abduction.

MPR and APM offered these investigations to listeners as both broadcast programs and as podcasts, both accompanied by additional web content. This work demonstrates the organization’s ongoing investment in longer, thought-provoking work that continues the tradition set forth by American RadioWorks and other programs that MPR has invested in for years.



Madeleine Baran and Sasha Aslanian won the 2015 Third Coast International Audio Festival award for Radio Impact for their documentary *Betrayed by Silence*. The four part documentary was the result of more than a year of research into the cover-up of child sex abuse by clergy members of the Archdiocese of St. Paul.

“The regularity of our productions, as well as their quality, along with the work being done by others in the industry, has carved out a new space for longer radio broadcasts in public radio,” says Stephen Smith, executive editor of APM Reports. “We’ve contributed to it.”

At MPR, educating and expanding listeners’ perspectives isn’t limited to on-air programs. In 2013, MPR News published its first e-book, “Fighting for an American Countryside” by Jennifer Vogel. The ebook was notable because it wasn’t radio, and it combined text and images to produce remarkable journalism. In vividly presenting the courage and creativity of contemporary rural Minnesotans, it demonstrated MPR’s connection with rural Minnesota at

a time when many rural and urban Americas coexist with mutual discomfort and unfamiliarity. Long before the 2016 election cycle, the team responsible for the ebook and GroundLevel, a larger, related project, was knee-deep in the conversations that would go on to shape the dominant media story of the day.

Consistently outstanding work leads to recognition from listeners and from the industry. MPR has received hundreds of prestigious honors including Peabody Awards, a Columbia duPont Golden Batton, John F. Kennedy, and Associated Press Awards. MPR and APM are leading an important evolution in radio storytelling—one good for listeners who enjoy in-depth and meaningful work. “And it will all be available wherever listeners happen to be and on the devices they want,” Smith adds.

“Nothing Compares 2 U”

MPR has shared its air waves with rising stars over the years. No Minnesota artist shone brighter than Prince, and over a span of just six years, the ethereal rock star and his hometown station built a strong bond.

The connection began in 2010, when Prince made a surprise appearance at The Current’s fifth birthday party at First Avenue in Minneapolis. The station had reached out to some well-known Minnesota musicians to ask them to send video greetings. On a whim, they included Prince on that list never thinking he would show up. The day before the event, program director Jim McGuinn got a call from Prince’s assistant, who spoke a sentence most people never expect to hear in their lifetime: “I was talking to Prince today, and we’re coming to your party.”

Prince did show up, spending much of the party in First Avenue’s owners’ box, a perch Prince often occupied during concerts to observe bands from above the crowd. “He told me he was there because of what The Current means to the community, and he wanted to show his support. It really meant a lot to us to get that endorsement from him,” McGuinn says.

After that, The Current’s staff often visited Prince’s home base at Paisley Park to take in small-scale concerts and hear recordings and performances of his unreleased songs. They saw him give as much in front of a small roomful of people as he did in front of the millions who saw his legendary Super Bowl performance in 2007.

Prince soon embraced The Current as *his* local station and as a direct route to connecting with his fans. He often premiered songs on The Current, and in

December 2015, he gave the go ahead for The Current to play songs for the Purple Snow marathon, a 26-hour bounty of 300 of his compositions triggered by an inch of snow falling at his home in Chanhassen.

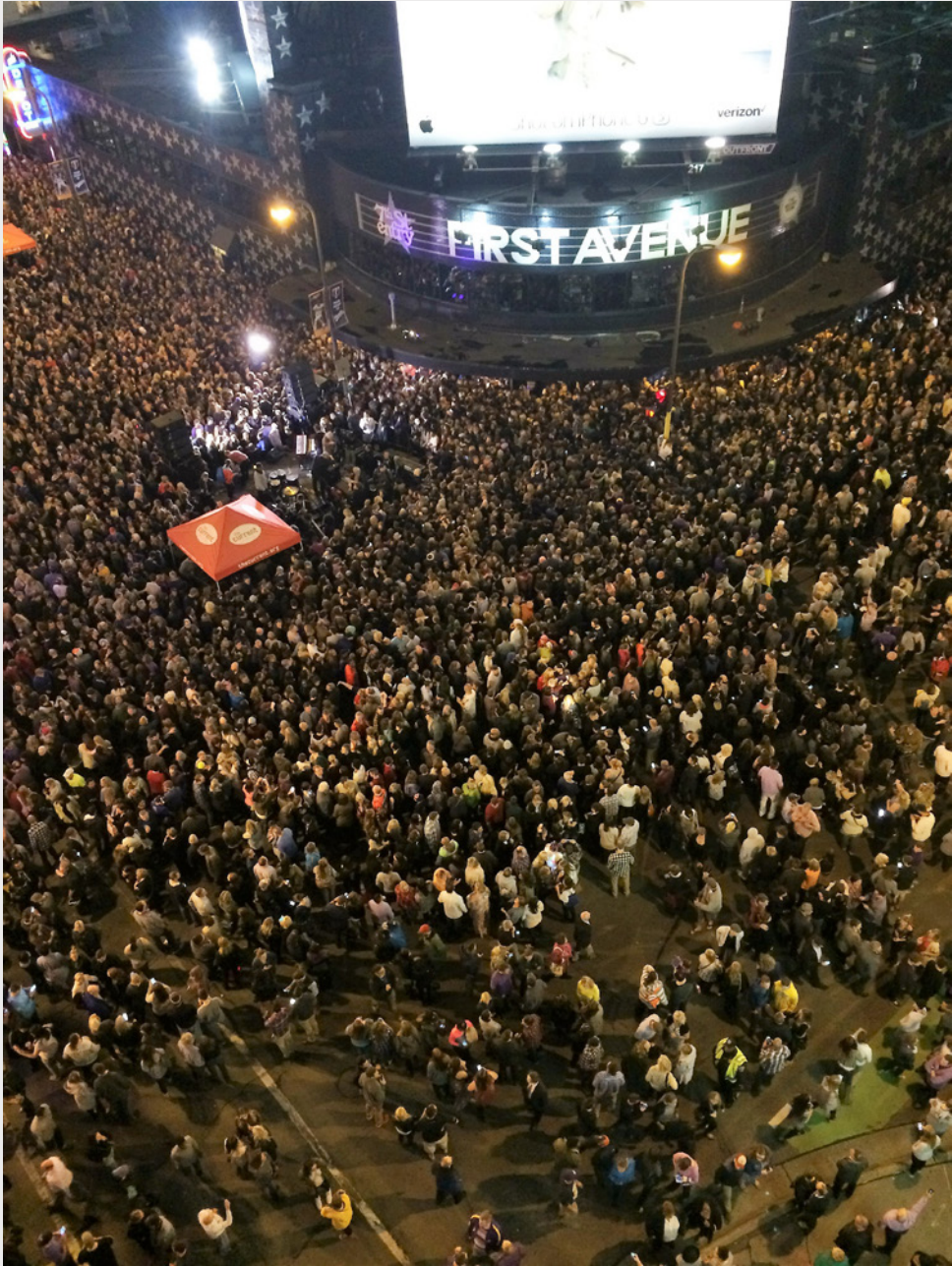
News of Prince's death on April 21, 2016, hit The Current staff hard. Everyone at the station had a personal story of why his music mattered to them.

In spite of the emotional toll, the station put together a chronological array of 85 of his songs within hours of his death. That program was followed by a 30-hour Prince marathon. Afternoon host Mary Lucia opened up phone lines and asked people to call in to share their feelings. Fans of Prince all over the world listened online—people from 216 nations and territories, almost every political entity on Earth. It was a New Orleans-style wake, a spontaneous musical celebration that helped the music community come to terms with losing its favorite son.

Starting on the day Prince died, The Current combined forces with MPR News to cover one of the biggest music stories of the century. While The Current prepared its tribute to Prince, MPR news teams mobilized to respond to Prince's death as one of the biggest stories to hit the state since the passing of Senator Paul Wellstone. News reporters with deep ties to public officials connected to The Current, and Jim McGuinn talked to MPR News about the impact of Prince's music on generations of people. Engineers and producers were deployed to Paisley Park and other key areas to gather interviews and await more details. International conversations were held with the BBC and other news outlets to get on-the-ground coverage. The team responsible for



The Current's Andrea Swensson live on the phone with Jade from Paisley Park in Chanhassen, MN, April 21, 2016.



People gathered outside First Ave to mourn Prince, April 21, 2016.



Lizzo performs outside First Avenue to a crowd gathered to mourn Prince.

putting together Rock the Garden, an event that takes months to plan, contacted the City of Minneapolis and asked if they could put together a public tribute outside First Avenue later that very day. The City said yes.

The Current's Andrea Swensson went to Paisley Park when the news broke of Prince's death, and she went on the air with Jade, a midday host, Swensson recalls it as a remarkable moment shared with others there. "My head was just spinning," she says. She broke down in the middle of reporting the news because of the communal feeling of grief.

Reporters from the BBC, CNN, *Rolling Stone*, and other news outlets used the expertise of The Current's staffers in their own coverage. Better than any other radio station in the world, The Current led in paying homage to this rare talent. "Everyone did turn to them," wrote Ben Collins of *The Daily Beast*.

“It wasn’t just Minneapolis, either. It was anybody on the internet who wanted to listen to Prince right away.” The Current aired Prince’s song “Nothing Compares 2 U” precisely seven hours and thirteen days after his death, a time significant in the song lyrics. About 100 other radio stations nationwide joined in this mass tribute, an unprecedented cooperative effort that spanned broadcast genres and formats

The Current rose to new heights in covering this emerging story. By filling such a deep need for music lovers around the world, The Current had come a long way in fulfilling the potential envisioned for it from the start. Bill Kling, who initially advised the station’s founders to make sure it met MPR’s high standards, now believes that The Current “is a far greater success than anyone imagined.”

Local Current host and blogger Andrea Swensson had become his friend. *Local Current* is a special show and a 24/7 stream of music dedicated entirely to musicians from Minnesota.

Essay by

Andrea Swensson

My relationship with Prince began with a friendly barter.

Prince was in the midst of a historic run of rehearsal shows at the Dakota Jazz Club, a tiny space in downtown Minneapolis that only holds a few hundred people. There were no cameras or cell phones allowed in the venue, so when I attended the second night to write a review for the Current's website, I did what any enterprising reporter (or courtroom sketch artist) would do—I scribbled a little doodle of Prince onto a page of my notebook, snapped a photo of the drawing when I got home, and added it to the recap I'd written with the tongue-in-cheek caption "Prince and his band."

I woke up the next day to an email: "Prince would like to have your drawing."

What did that mean? I wondered. That thought was followed immediately by a startling realization: Holy crap, Prince reads our blog.

By this point, the Current had already had a few fascinating encounters with the Purple Yoda, who seemed to drift in and out of the Twin Cities music scene like a violet fog. He'd shown up at the Current's birthday party at First Avenue in 2010, hovering in the owner's box long enough to shake hands with several staff

members, check out an acoustic performance by Mason Jennings, and set the whole Mainroom abuzz. He'd sent new music for the station to premiere, including the 2010 single "Cause and Effect." And he'd invited our program director, Jim McGuinn, out to Paisley Park to listen to meet one-on-one and tour his facilities.

When I joined the Current a couple years later as a writer, there was always a nagging suspicion that anything—everything?—we were doing that was related to Prince might be consumed by the man himself. He did not hide his support of the Current, and we did not hide our fascination with him and his work; getting that email from his camp about my drawing felt like plugging into a circuit that was sending vibrations back and forth at an undetectably high frequency.

I wrote back immediately, and with a confidence that I can only credit to the purple aura that was still lingering from the previous evening's concert. Let's make a deal, I proposed: If I provided Prince with a hi-res scan of my drawing, could I come back and enjoy the show again that evening? And maybe he'd like to premiere some more new music on the station? To my surprise, the answer to both questions was yes.

That night I stood in the VIP section of the Dakota surrounded by Prince's oldest friends and collaborators, watching in awe as he debuted his brand-new rock trio, 3RDEYEGIRL. A few days later he used my drawing as the cover art for a live recording from the Dakota, which he released on YouTube. Within a few weeks, 3RDEYEGIRL were visiting me at the Current's studios to conduct an interview and share a new song. And by that summer I was

a regular at Prince's incendiary Paisley Park After Dark jams, dancing and taking notes until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and then heading to the Chanhassen Perkins to type up recaps of some of the most potent, in-the-moment live performances I've ever witnessed, finally heading home at dawn.

Our orbits around one another tightened, and in June 2014 I found myself standing face-to-face with Prince himself, shaking his hand and peering into his mesmerizing, outsized Bambi eyes while trying to remember my name and at least a few of the hundreds of questions I'd always wanted to ask him about his music and life.

He disarmed me that night, joking around with me like we were on the schoolyard. After a couple of hours of conversation, and as his house band serenaded us, he reached out his hand and asked me to dance—then snatched his hand away and laughed, saying “Just kidding!” Bobby Z., who accompanied me to Paisley Park on that unforgettable night, leaned over and said, “I think you have a new friend.”

I don't know what the rest of Prince's friendships were like, but mine was sweet and funny and oh so fleeting. Less than two years later, on April 21, 2016, I found myself standing on the grass outside of Paisley Park and peering through teary eyes at a new text from Bobby Z. that simply said, “Devastated.” In that moment, I knew that Prince was gone. In the next one, I was on the phone with Jade, breaking the news live on the Current.

That day is still a blur to me, but one moment will forever be fossilized in my mind. After spending hours on the phone with media outlets around the world, I finally drove away from Chanhassen as

dusk fell and headed toward downtown Minneapolis, where every skyscraper was glowing purple and the sky had even turned a dark shade of violet.

The Current had organized a block party to celebrate and send off Prince, and over ten thousand people from every walk of life crammed into the street in front of First Avenue to dance and cry and sing in unison. I had cried a little off and on that day, but it wasn't until I pressed myself into that crowd and heard Chastity Brown's mournful voice start up the opening refrain of "Purple Rain" that the floodgates really opened. My knees buckled and I felt myself crumpling under the weight of it all, but I didn't fall; I realized that everyone around me was hugging me and holding me upright, and that we were all going through this devastating loss together.

We talk a lot about our incredible music community in the work that we do at the Current, but that night the words leapt off the page and became heartbreakingly, awe-inspiringly tangible. As the tears fell and a sea of strained voices lifted his melodies up into the night air, I looked up to the sky and said something I wish I'd told him while he was here: "Thank you."

The Show Goes On

In 2014, Garrison Keillor announced his departure from *A Prairie Home Companion* ten months before it happened. Unlike his earlier attempts to leave the show behind, this time he would make the decision stick.

“He’s an American icon,” says Jon McTaggart. “There won’t be another like him. He’s a singular talent and an extraordinary life force.”

The first in a series of farewell performances came on February 27, 2016, when Keillor made his last appearance on *APHC* at the Fitzgerald Theater in Saint Paul, the program’s home base for the previous 38 years. On July 1, seventeen broadcast performances later, he hosted his final live broadcast of *A Prairie Home Companion* before a sold-out audience at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. An era had ended.

With Keillor’s blessing, the show went on, now hosted by mandolinist and songwriter Chris Thile. A frequent guest on Keillor’s show, Thile made his *APHC* debut at the age of 15 and reappearing numerous times as a solo performer and with his bands Nickel Creek and Thile’s own band, Punch Brothers. Renamed *Live From Here*, MPR is remaking the program to serve curious people who are eager to explore a wide range of music genres and diverse performers. The new show continues the tradition of inviting listeners to sit down with a radio in their kitchen or on their dock—or on the road in their car—and turn on the radio on a Saturday afternoon and know that everyone within earshot will be entertained. Thile, the recipient of a MacArthur “Genius Grant”, sees the new show as “a beautiful oasis of wonder and celebration.” He compares hosting the program to “drawing a Monopoly card that says, ‘Bank error in your favor.’”



Fans wait outside the Fitzgerald Theater to buy tickets for the season premiere of *A Prairie Home Companion*, September 2015.



Chris Thile prepares backstage at the Fitzgerald Theater for a guest appearance on *A Prairie Home Companion* on October 17, 2015. Thile was a regular guest on the show before becoming host himself in 2016.



The audience watches the final performance of *A Prairie Home Companion*, held at the Hollywood Bowl in LA.



Garrison Keillor waves farewell at his final performance of *A Prairie Home Companion*, held at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, California.

CHAPTER 6



A Great Run

As founder and CEO Bill Kling approached retirement, a new chapter would begin in the story of Minnesota Public Radio.

As a five-year-old, Bill Kling would sit on his grandfather's lap at the family's farm, near Lake City, Minnesota, while they listened to distant radio stations. The family used a massive battery operated radio with a long-wire antenna, extending out into the orchard, an antenna that could pull in signals from around the country.

Kling never got over the excitement he would feel listening to that radio. Following that excitement drove Kling to build a rural college radio service from thin air to a regional network, satellites, and cell phones around the world, and to climb a few radio towers in the process.

Years before his retirement, Kling speculated on the kind of career he might have liked if he hadn't founded and become president of Minnesota Public Radio: he would have enjoyed running a hardware store. "I go into them and spend hours there looking at things," he said. "A good hardware store is a wonderful thing, full of so much stuff that nobody knows what it's all for. The more you look at it, the more you think of what it could be for."

In a sense, Kling viewed MPR the same way. It began as a classical music service with some news. With the talent, expertise, and dedication of its people, combined with anticipating ways to apply new technologies, MPR could do even



Garrison Keillor at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, TN, May 6, 2016.

more. Kling stretched and pulled the organization, expanding in directions that no other public radio broadcaster had conceived.

He took risks, as when he gave a DJ and storyteller named Garrison Keillor the chance to start a live show based on the Grand Old Opry. He championed the satellite distribution of programming and then guided MPR into the digital distribution of shows. He understood the strength of money in the bank, which is why he encouraged such profit-earning ventures as Rivertown Trading Company (RTC), the Saint Paul cable TV partnership, and American Public Media. Several of the organization's branches, including MPR, Southern California Public Radio, and the Fitzgerald Theater share crucial administrative functions, the result of Kling's interest in expanding the organization through a sharing of resources and infrastructure. For inspiration, he often looked at



Valerie Arganbright, the managing director for Membership, stands next to a sign on the MPR lawn celebrating a membership milestone. Arganbright started at MPR in 1990 as the general manager of MPR's stations in south western Minnesota and Sioux Falls, SD.

the needs and interests of new audiences, as reflected in the decision to launch *The Current*.

Kling's personal qualities carried MPR even further. An aggressive competitor who was energetic, entrepreneurial, opinionated, impatient, analytical, visionary, stiff necked, and obsessed by the workings and potential of broadcasting, he had a single-minded focus on giving Minnesota the best public radio service in the country. He ran MPR like a business and didn't think twice about calling staff members at 5:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning if he thought something was wrong. He challenged and partnered with the organization's strong board not as a manager or strategist, but as an entrepreneur. And as a result of his leadership, MPR became the best-financed, largest, and most stable regional public media organization in the nation. He pushed the idea of a local and regional public radio system further than anyone.

Kling retired from MPR in 2011 after leading it for 45 years. The organization was in good shape, his most recent five-year contract had ended, and the timing was right. Still, it wasn't easy for Kling to step away. "It's like building your own house, and you're building it the way you want it," he says. "You know why you ran the conduit in this direction rather than that direction. You know the quality you put into it. You know that the carpenter used hardwoods. That's what keeps somebody in place and enables them to add value."

President emeritus "is a title which no one fully understands. But I recommend it because nobody knows what it does mean, what it requires, or what it doesn't allow," Kling observes. He says he still feels connected to MPR. He can be anywhere in the world, and he can listen to Minnesota Public Radio or Southern California Public Radio online. He can listen to them on any number of devices. When he's in other states to see what their stations are like, all of a sudden he'll hear *Live From Here* or *Marketplace* and he'll be filled with pride. "But it also means you never escape the product. It's there twenty-four hours a day every day, anywhere in the world."

Kling wishes he could whisper some advice into the ear of the young version of himself who began working to start MPR in 1966. "I'd tell him, 'Take a little more time for yourself,'" he says. "It was intense from the moment I started. For the first five years of getting the station running, I didn't take one day off, not even a weekend. Your life gets distorted by that. Your friends evaporate. You've got to have a life while your life is happening. I got a lot from my career, but I think I missed a lot, too."

If young Bill Kling had followed that advice, MPR would be different now. Like many of the best founder-run companies, it would not have achieved its success without pushing boundaries as far as they could go. In doing so, Kling shaped the organization, at least at the beginning, in the image of the founder. Without that ambition, drive, and vision, MPR would probably have been more ordinary.

Passing the Baton

Kling's retirement was no surprise to the organization. The MPR and APMG boards had sufficient time to think deeply about the qualities they wanted in his successor while conducting a nationwide search for a new president.

Conceiving and founding a successful public radio organization and cultivating its constant entrepreneurial growth over 45 years are different challenges than leading a large, well-established group of media companies to serve new and diverse audiences while embracing and exploiting an exploding array of new technologies.

After considering more than 200 candidates, the MPR and APMG Boards unanimously chose Jon McTaggart, MPR's Chief Operating Officer (COO), who had played important roles in many MPR innovations and expansions over his 25 years with the organization. While very different from Kling, McTaggart understood the organization from top to bottom, having worked in and led most of its divisions.

McTaggart is a strategic thinker who professionally matured amidst the goals and mission that make MPR what it is, and worked to advance them ever since he joined the organization. One board member praised McTaggart for his ability to take “ambiguity and create a positive outcome”—that valuable skill of finding opportunities in situations where others see only threats and uncertainty.

McTaggart, who grew up in Frazee in north central Minnesota, had a hand in countless MPR projects and activities over the years. Dennis Hamilton, then General Manager of KCCM-FM in Moorhead, Minn. first hired McTaggart in



Jon McTaggart, President and CEO of MPR, with guests at Rock the Garden 2013.

1983 as a recent college graduate to build KCRB-FM, a new network station in Bemidji. Because MPR was starting the station from scratch, McTaggart had to do many things he'd never done before: help install the transmitter, solder wires to help assemble the studio, and work with the engineers to get the studio-to-transmitter link mounted atop the tallest building at Bemidji State University. McTaggart conscripted his younger brother Jac, and the two of them crawled through underground steam tunnels to run miles of audio cables across the campus. And all that was before McTaggart hired the staff, enlisted volunteers, invited members, cultivated donors and found underwriters to support the new station.

In 1989, after a stint as executive director of a hospital foundation in Reading, Penn., McTaggart returned to MPR to manage KSJR-FM in Collegeville and to work on the network's dual channel initiative—separating its news channels and its classical music channels to newly constructed or acquired MPR stations throughout the region. He was soon leading radio station construction projects

for MPR all over the state—in Morris, Alexandria, Fergus Falls, Thief River Falls, International Falls, Brainerd, Duluth, and Sun Valley, Idaho.

An executive leadership opportunity took him to La Sierra University in Riverside, Calif., for a few years, but MPR lured him back in 1995. He remembers getting

a call from Dennis Hamilton, the same MPR executive who had hired him the first time. “Bill Kling thinks you’ve been in California long enough,” Hamilton told him.

Once back at MPR, McTaggart steadily rose in the organization, working in a series of key positions: head of business development, senior vice president of new media, head of programming, and chief operating officer for MPR and the APM Group.

McTaggart was involved in, planned, lead, or implemented many of the organization’s important initiatives of the past 35 years, including MPR’s early investments in the internet and digital media, the creation of Southern California Public Radio, the Public Insight Network, the purchase of Marketplace Productions, the creation and launch of The Current, establishing American Public Media (APM) to produce and distribute national programs, and bringing a new classical music service to listeners across southern Florida. “They’ve all been tremendous learning experiences, and each made real contributions to our public service,” he says.

In the years since McTaggart was named president and CEO of MPR and APMG, audiences and members have multiplied, and financial support and revenues have grown significantly. McTaggart says part of his job is to ensure that MPR and APMG constantly honor the four principles that Kling taught



Jon McTaggart in Collegetown office.

him are essential for public media organizations to stay successful: 1) be independent in structure; 2) build a strong and deeply engaged board; 3) hire talented people and accountable leaders; and, 4) have an inspiring vision to create value that the community will generously support.

It's always a risk to succeed a founder, especially a highly accomplished founder that has lead the organization for decades. But McTaggart and Kling acknowledged that risk, and were committed to do more than simply make it work. "Bill has set a marvelous example of founder succession—caring, correcting, championing, and advising when asked, and not getting into my soup at other times," McTaggart says. "It's means the world to me to have his confidence and trust, his ear and his friendship."

McTaggart's leadership style has changed the way the MPR and APMG boards work. During the Kling years, the Board gave him much latitude as a chief executive, partly owing to his long record of turning creative ideas into viable businesses. Kling made leaps of thought that the board often had to catch up with; sometimes it supported these leaps, and sometimes it didn't.

Now, decisions are often more deliberate. "On this board, you're surrounded by lots of interesting and creative people," says long-time MPR board member Tad Piper. McTaggart's approach is to make sure board members absorb the creative core of MPR, and bring their energy, experience, and knowledge to help make things happen. He expects the board to be diverse in many



Jon McTaggart thanks members and listeners for supporting MPR at St Johns University during the MPR Day event on April 25, 2017. Throughout the 50th anniversary, Minnesota Public Radio traveled to Collegeville, Mankato, Ely, and Moorhead for MPR Days, a series of concerts, community activities, and live broadcasts of all three services.



Greenspring Media Board Thank You Dinner, November 4, 2013
The Capital Grille, Downtown Minneapolis

Seated L to R—Donna Avery, Susan Boren, Connley Brooks, Bill Kling, Jim Dolan, Billie Young, Jon McTaggart. *Standing L to R*—Dave Kansas, Fred Senn, Pat Denzer, Mark Alfuth, Rothschild, Stephen Hedlund, Deb Chernick, Tom Kigin, Tad Piper, Tony Christianson, Tim Shears. *Unable to attend*—Steve Fox, Jerry Wenger, Barry Lindquist, Greg Herrick, Robert Auritt, Marvin Goldstein, Nikki Sorum, Ian Friendly, Brad Anderson

different ways and to help find ways to reach and serve more diverse audiences. The MPR Board is actively involved in informing and shaping the strategies that will advance the organization’s goals in entrepreneurial and innovative ways. “We often ask: Where are we going to make a bet? What are we going to invest in?” says MPR board member Steve Rothschild. “It’s all about benefiting our audiences.”

Essay by

Susan S. Boren

I joined MPR's board in 1983 not realizing that I was doing something that would change my life forever. It seemed back then that it was enough that I was part of a good board governing an important community organization. I was new to the Twin Cities and it helped me connect. Thinking about that today, I smile. MPR has been so much more than a board seat for me.

I spend some part of every day listening to MPR, not just to the "station", but to the people I've come to trust, to the music I've learned to love, to news that helps me create context for my life in community ... locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. I can't imagine a day without MPR. When I travel, no matter where, I find a way to connect. It grounds me. It is part of my personal definition of "home".

Having been a part of MPR for over 30 years, I've participated in many changes. Most of them have contributed to the growth of the music and news services, as well as the increasing platforms on which 'listeners' can access incredibly diverse content.

I'm proud to have been part of decisions like investing in Rivertown Trading and then selling it to create a lasting endowment for MPR. The decision to build a new headquarters

brought staff together and welcomed the community inside the world of broadcasting, giving MPR an important convening space. The commitment to a digital world where “radio” is less relevant and our success is based on our creativity and excellence has provided access to new audiences on new platforms. I’m proud of the courage it took to launch The Current and the incredible people who have made it successful, and the same is true of MPR’s partnership with the BBC. The truth is, each year of my association with MPR has been dynamic and filled with the energy that comes from being part of a group of people who understand that to stop innovating and growing is to stop breathing.

There is no other commitment of time and money in my life that has returned so much to me. When I come back to the Twin Cities after being away, I feel welcomed home when I get in a taxi and hear one of MPR’s great services on the radio. Whether it’s news or music, MPR really does bring our community together and the world into our community.

Thank you, MPR, for making my life so much richer than it might have been.

Beginning Our Next 50 Years

At MPR and across the APM Group (APMG), entrepreneurial and creative minds continue to pioneer new standards in using media for public service. Taking chances, innovating, learning from mistakes and building on successes are the underpinnings of changing any field or industry, and MPR has excelled at this since its first broadcast in 1967.

Celebrating its first 50 years, MPR has become a leading voice for public radio and a trusted resource for its growing audiences. It's given listeners vital ways to connect with the world, and to find the important and beautiful in their lives, just as Father Colman Barry and Bill Kling imagined during the turbulent 1960s.

The story is not complete, and MPR's next 50 years will surely build on that legacy of informing, inspiring and connecting. MPR's story continues today, making its mission and values come alive for the people and the communities it serves, and constantly setting new standards for itself and others.

Epilogue by

Jon McTaggart

Over the past 50 years, nearly 5,000 employees and countless volunteers have been building on the dream that first inspired Minnesota Public Radio. Hundreds of thousands of members, donors, companies and foundations have invested in that dream which became MPR's mission. After 50 years, MPR has made real progress, but we're not satisfied.

Just as in the 1960s, today we see disruption and conflict and unsettling times. And we are looking forward and we are dreaming. Constantly.

We're imagining the next 50 years. While it's clear MPR's future will be very different from its past, one thing won't change: our Mission. That mission, "To enrich minds and nourish spirits, to expand perspective and to help our audiences strengthen communities" is even more important today than it was 50 years ago.

We still have big dreams. Dreams inspired by the changing needs of our communities and the country. Our clearest priority, our imperative, is to serve more people and make an even bigger difference in the lives of the people and the communities we serve. Because we have always been more than dreamers, we've set

an ambitious goal to double the number of people we serve with programming that is even more important and compelling than what we've already produced.

To make our vision a reality, we must invest in people with new skills and ideas; we must create new programming for larger and more diverse audiences; we must embrace and master new technologies; we must be more curious; and we must earn the trust and support of more Minnesotans and more Americans.

That means expanding our journalism and investing in new storytelling and sense-making and civil discussion. That means inspiring a whole new generation to love great music. It means working with partners to make our communities a place where more musicians and artists want to live and make their living.

In our picture of the future, our public service will be more available to more people, everywhere—on the radio and on your favorite devices—and we must be ready to serve people on devices that have not yet been invented and those not even imagined. Our communities and the country need us to be even more relevant, more trustworthy, more informative and more inspiring for more people.

Dreams are powerful. Sharing a dream is even more powerful. We will continue to look to our audiences and communities for inspiration. And we will continue to share our dreams with you. We are grateful for your confidence, for your generous gifts and investments in our vision and for joining us in our mission of public service.

The next 50 years hold great promise. Dream with us. And help us make more dreams come true . . .

PHOTOGRAPHY

Unless otherwise noted below, all
photographs are from the archives of
Minnesota Public Radio.

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This story would be incomplete without recognizing the many people who have shared their recollections as this book was prepared. This includes:

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Michael Barone	Tom Kigin
Dick Daly	Jon McTaggart
Gary Eichten	Nicholas Nash
Kate Gustafson	Brian Newhouse
Dennis Hamilton	Peter Ostroushko
Randy Johnson	Bob Potter
Bill Kling	Vern Sutton

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MPR's history has been told in books, magazines, and broadcasts. In this book we've shared some tales from *Minnesota Monthly*, and its predecessors *Preview* program guide.

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