

**The Prairie Home Companion. A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor
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Only watch this film if you are a fan of American radio shows, find yourself bored in Idaho or want to help a dying church reflect on their future in a changing world.

Prairie Home Companion is the name of the film. It is also the name of a radio show, recorded live in front of a paying theatre audience. Every Saturday night you experience a mix of favourite songs, clever advertisements for imaginary products, letters from listeners and homely repartee brought to you by *Prairie Home Companion* radio host Garrison Keillor. To this day, the *Prairie Home Companion* radio show continues, a real life institution broadcast by 580 public radio stations to over 4 million listeners. But wait, there's more. This very Saturday you too could purchase tickets to sit in a Minnesota theatre and applaud the *Prairie Home Companion* as it goes live into the homes of America. So watch this film if you are a fan of American radio shows.

Or watch this film if you are bored in Idaho. I had a free Friday night in Idaho in June and my hosts suggested this movie. I enjoyed the acting of a star studded cast, including Woody Allen, Tommy Lee Jones and Meryl Streep, Lindsay Lohan and Kevin Kline. A number of cinematic devices added mystery and sustained my attention. The dialogue is witty, cutting from backstage reminiscing over the good old days, to the live stage where country and folk music dominates. However the laughter in this Idaho theatre merely underlined how much this movie connected with an American childhood that was not my own.

Or watch this film if you are part of a dying church in a changing world. (Hence this film should be of interest to many churches and pastors in New Zealand.) *Prairie Home Companion* is a film about the final performance of the *Prairie Home Companion* radio show. (In real life the radio show did actually close in 1987, only to reopen in 1993). The film introduces a rich investor who has brought the radio show and Minnesota theatre, with plans to euthanise what he considers a cultural dinosaur.

In contrast, the characters played by Garrison Keillor and Meryl Streep have lived all their working lives inside the *Prairie Home Companion* radio show. All they want to do is keep singing, and thus keep alive, the old songs. They struggle to conceive of a world that does not gather on a Saturday evening around the family radio to enjoy country music and folk ballads. The presence of Lindsay Lohan, playing an angst ridden teenage, writing suicide poetry while her mother (played by Meryl Streep) reminisces over the past, underlines the widening gulf between generations. *Prairie Home Companion* thus offers a fascinating window into responses to generational cultural change. You observe classic postures of avoidance, denial and disbelief. As such, it offers a creative way to initiate dialogue in a dying congregation regarding the future of faith in a changing world.

Prairie Home Companion is due for New Zealand release later in 2006.

500 words

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