

# What if Jesus walked on the waters of Lake Wobegon?

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS)—They don't serve Powdermilk Biscuits in the Collins Alumni Auditorium at Lipscomb University, not far from downtown Nashville. There's no Guy's All-Star Shoe Band. Guy Noir is nowhere in sight. And if Brother Preacher ever got hold of Garrison Keillor, he might Bible-thump him all the way back to Lake Wobegon.

Still, if [A Prairie Home Companion](#) ever moved south and came to Jesus, it might look a lot like *Tokens*.



*Tokens*, Nashville's "new, old-time radio show," offers a mix of theology, A-list local musicians, and a hearty helping of Southern-flavored satire.

For the past two years, Lipscomb religion professor Lee Camp has been hosting Nashville's "new, old-time radio show," which offers a mix of theology, A-list local musicians, and a hearty helping of Southern-flavored satire. Camp bills [Tokens](#) as: "Too serious for public radio. Too edgy for Christian radio. Too much fun to miss."

*Tokens* debuted in 2008 and performs before a live audience about five times a year, although it is moving toward more a frequent rotation. Episodes are recorded and available online as podcasts, downloads and CDs.

A recent show was titled "Back to Green," and it featured Christian music

star Amy Grant and environmental capitalist Tom Szaky—who’s made millions using worms to recycle garbage into fertilizer. It also featured the Tokens Radio players, who satirized Szaky’s work with a skit about a company call Wigglescat.

Humor plays a large part in the show’s sideways approach to theology and social issues. If he can get people to laugh, Camp says, they are more willing to listen—even when the show takes on issues like justice, materialism and the environment.

“We try to use the humor and music to sneak up on people, and get them to look at substantive issues,” said Camp. “You get a lot further by approaching things at an angle. If you approach things head on, then people get entrenched in what they think they already know.”

Camp was inspired by Keillor. The theology professor had listened to *A Prairie Home Companion* for years, and he wondered if he could use a similar approach to talk about theology.



Christian singer Amy Grant (center) leads a recent show of Tokens, a theological take on A Prairie Home Companion, in Nashville. (RNS PHOTO/Courtesy of Justin Wright/Tokens)

Before starting *Tokens*, Camp approached his friend Randy Goodman, chairman of the County Music Association, about starting the program, expecting him to reject the idea. Instead, Goodman gave him thumbs up.

Camp admits anxiety about failing, more than anything, had been holding him back.

“If you can overcome the fear of failure, it’s amazing to see what can happen,” he said.

The first cast member to sign up was Jeff Taylor, who now serves as the show’s musical director. Taylor helped recruit A-list Nashville session players. Taylor also helped get musical guests like Grant, Ashley Cleveland, Vince Gill and Buddy Greene to appear on the show, which premiered Feb. 19, 2008.

The show’s radio troupe is a mixture of professional and amateur actors, including Greg Lee, an actor from Ohio, who plays “Brother Preacher”—a pitch-perfect imitation of a Baptist preacher who’s got nothing to say but doesn’t let that get in his way. There’s also Merri Collins, a pediatrician and church friend of Camp’s, along with fellow Lipscomb theologian David Fler who said he signed up because of Camp’s approach to theology.

“We have a very conservative audience,” he said. “And Lee is presenting some not-so-conservative ideas. I look out at the audience, and not only are they listening, but they are also hearing what Lee’s trying to say. And that’s rare.”



Grammy award winner Ashley Cleveland, who appeared on the show last year, said she’d heard about the show from friends, and she jumped at the chance to play on *Tokens*. “Faith should never be reduced to a to-do list,” she said. “It should always start with a celebration.”

That doesn’t mean that *Tokens* is simply an overtly Christian imitation of *A Prairie Home Companion*. While they deal with theology, Camp and the cast are after something bigger—glimpses of God’s action in the world, or tokens of grace.

“We didn’t want to do something just for the church crowd,” said Buddy Green, who’s been a regular guest on the show.

In June, *Tokens* will celebrate its tenth episode. That’ll be followed by a November show at the Ryman for Thanksgiving. Right now, the episodes are recorded and can be ordered online at [tokensshow.com](http://tokensshow.com). Camp hopes someday the show will be broadcast as well.

Despite the serious topics in the show, Camp said he’s mainly motivated by the sheer joy of performing.

“Christians don’t do many things simply for the delight of doing them,” he said. “That’s something we are trying to do. It’s an exercise in delight.”