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# Words alone cannot capture Garrison Keillor


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Writing about storyteller/singer Garrison Keillor is rather like making love with gloves on. A lot of sensitivity and personality is invariably masked in the translation.

Going over my notes of a recent chat with Keillor, I missed the laid-back yet expressive intonation in his Minnesota-bred voice — his dry, soft-spoken gentility, his ironic comic accents, his folksy earnestness that seems so rare and rewarding to an Easterner's ears.

We schmoozed some about the comedy and music show this raconteur is doing around the country, with support from Leo Kottke and Richard and Linda Williams and Kate McKenzie.

Keillor calls North Dakota native Kottke "the original New Age guitarist," because he "makes you see visions of cars rusting behind the barn."



Garrison Keillor ... has to be seen

Keillor likes to play at summer pavilions, " 'cause a tall guy can sit on the grass and stretch his legs."

He's 6 feet, 3½ inches, but

you wouldn't know it from listening to him on the radio, because Keillor crouches behind the microphone. "I don't want to sound like I'm looming."

What else did I learn? He's got a kid old enough to be touring and playing guitar behind him.

On this 19-city tour, which he's been calling "The Sweet Corn Show," Keillor's upholding his Scout-like reputation.

Yes, fans, he leaves his dressing room just the way he finds it.

Touring is really good practice, Keillor says. "It forces you to be expansive and cheerful every night ... It's not easy to keep lying with passion and sincerity ... to overcome the temptation to truthfulness."

We ruminated about what it's like living and working in New York City, after all those years freeing his ears off in Minnesota. Keillor was 45 when he made

the switch — one year ago — so he's still pretty set in his ways. He said Midwesterners are a lot more polite, but he admires New Yorkers' directness.

"If you're boring people with your conversation at a dinner party, a Midwesterner will let you just hang yourself. A New Yorker will do you the great service of butting in, putting you out of your misery."

Though he's not as much a household name as say, Madonna or Bart Simpson, something like 4 million intelligent people have been devoting their Saturday supper hour to hanging out at the radio with Keillor and company since the early 1980s — first on "A Prairie Home Companion" out of St. Paul, Minn., more recently on his "American Radio Company of the Air," which comes out of New York but still oozes that homespun Lake Wobegon vibe.

The literati who read the

New Yorker and Atlantic Monthly have been tittering over Keillor's stuff even longer, harking back to the early 1970s, when he started doing a lot of those unsigned "Talk of The Town" musings like "Snack Firm Maps New Chip Push" and a memorable piece about visiting the Grand Ole Opry.

That one gave him the inspiration to do his own radio variety show, he says, though his radio career really started in college.

"I went into radio because I had no social life, so I wanted to have another reason for no social life." Keillor waxes poetic about this on his recent Virgin album, "Lake Wobegon Days," which also features "The Young Lutherans' Guide to the Symphony."

Yeah, it's easy to put down facts about this guy. What doesn't translate is Keillor's charm. This you've got to hear and feel for yourself.