

Students sample Keillor's humor

Shy Willmar teens share stage with radio star

WILLMAR (AP) — Minnesotans are different than folks in the rest of the country, Garrison Keillor told a Willmar audience recently.

One reason, said the creator of "A Prairie Home Companion," is that "On the great scale of human joy, many of us are missing a few of the top octaves."

But Keillor proved that although he pokes fun at us, he still revels in how different Minnesotans sometimes are.

With his hair disheveled and his dark blue suit slightly ruffled, Keillor wandered onto stage nearly 15 minutes after the noon performance was to begin.

As he bent over to pull scripts from his tote bag, it was plain that the man Time magazine called "The Bard of Lake Wobegon" was wearing bright red socks.

On the stage with the Anoka native were several dozen high school communication students.

Not exactly disproving Keillor's higher-octave theory, all but one of the sluggish students lacked the urge to become radio performers: Only Molly Gort volunteered to read a play with the writer-humorist.

"You're from Willmar?" Keillor asked Molly.

She said yes.

"Not for long," Keillor told her. "It's going to be New York and Hollywood."

When other students on the stage — who were there to learn about radio plays — failed to volunteer, Keillor turned to the nearly filled auditorium.

Abe Peterson, a junior high student, walked up to the stage wearing a public radio sticker on his forehead.

With Keillor portraying himself, Molly and Abe read the parts of Flo and Floyd, a couple of house flies nearing the end of their life cycles on the writer's studio window.

In a conversation with the writer, the two flies reveal that they thought Keillor was God. "We brought up 400 children worshipping you," an exasperated Flo says when she discovers her error. "It's a terrible thing to lose your religion at the



AP PHOTO

Garrison Keillor (right) recently performed a radio-style script with high school student Erin Tvete in Willmar.

end of your life."

Keillor also led students through an episode of "Guy Noir: Radio Private Eye," a regular feature of "A Prairie Home Companion."

Although he called his radio show an "award-nominated" program, "A Prairie Home Companion" and Keillor have received a George Foster Peabody Award, an Edward R. Murrow Award and a medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

He began his performance in Willmar by explaining that the pauses that often occur during his reports on the fictional town of Lake Wobegon happen because he doesn't write the monologues in advance.

After years of giving his improvised reports, he has learned a skill that many ministers seem to have.

"I've developed the ability to talk until I think of what to say," he said.

He says most Minnesotans he's met aren't offended by his depiction of them. "Most Minnesotans feel I'm not portraying them," Keillor said. "Perhaps some of their relatives."

"Many Minnesotans believe they're

far more sophisticated than the people of Lake Wobegon. This, of course, is the greatest joke of all."



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