

'Finn' again

Garrison Keillor reads his own adaptation of Mark Twain's beloved story

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The man touted as "America's favorite storyteller," Garrison Keillor, has joined leagues with America's other favorite storyteller, Mark Twain. He reads his own adaptation of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (3 hours, \$17.95), produced by Penguin-HighBridge, the company that also produces recordings of many of his "Prairie Home Companion" performances.

The recording doesn't exactly fill a void. There are scads of recordings of "Huck Finn," both abridged and unabridged. (This is partly because it's such a great yarn in the first place, and partly because the original copyright has expired, so companies don't have to pay for it.)

Yet "America's favorite storyteller" certainly does it justice. Where most readers make Finn sound like a gritty, stream-smart little river rat, Keillor gives him a whiff of wistfulness and even an ingenious quality.

And it will go down in history as the only recording that changes the ending of the book. Keillor adapted it for audio to fit into the three-hour format (the entire book takes about eight hours to read out loud).



Keillor

In explaining himself, Keillor writes, that he kept "the parts I loved as a boy — Huck's story, the big river at night, the boasting of the raftsmen, the Duke and the Dauphin, the lynching, the feud — and lopping off the last third of the book, where Tom Sawyer comes in and makes a big production of freeing Jim. I had Huck free him instead. If you enjoy the reading, I am sure Mr. Twain will forgive me."

Well, even though I'd rather have Keillor read the whole thing, I guess I can forgive him — whether Twain does or not.

Keillor even has his own bit of fun, including on the cassette

jacket "A Note From the Hero's Father," one Newton P. Finn, a three-term member of Congress from Missouri.

Finn claims that the book "has some true parts in it, but most of it is stretched, as you'd expect from a writer who doesn't even use his own name."

And he says that while in the book Twain killed him off, "which was certainly convenient for him," the elder Finn was on the raft with Huck and Jim all along "as any father would do, and sharing quality time with him and imparting knowledge of the river and so forth."

The whole kit and caboodle is a powerful lot of fun.

A granddaughter's story

In her eulogy to slain Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin, Noa Ben Artzi-Pelossof called him "Grandfather."

But to this young woman of 19, who remembers Rabin best not as a world political figure but as a kind father figure giving her his characteristic half-smile over the rims of his reading glasses, he will always be her *saba*, her grandpa.

After his death — and after her turn as the youngest and one of the most heart-tugging digni-

taries to speak at his funeral — she wrote a 181-page tribute, "In the Name of Sorrow and Hope." And then Ben Artzi-Pelossof read the abridgment herself for a Random House recording (1 1/2 hours, \$14).

Any grandfather would be proud of his granddaughter. She writes, and reads, with devotion and conviction, yet with the simplicity you'd expect for someone her age.

This is not a slick, much-coached book or production. I'm so happy the producers for the audio didn't stop her during the recording and correct her English. The few mistakes in tense or pronunciation make this all the more charming and compelling.

"In the Name of Sorrow and Hope" is a from-the-heart account of a loved one who also happens to be a man of historic proportions. Ben Artzi-Pelossof comes across as exactly what she must be — a smart young woman able to think for herself who loved her grandfather dearly. She has a keen sense of irony, noting it was not war that killed her *saba*, it was peace.

It is chilling to hear her recount her own history referring to "my first war," and then "my second war," and so on. What kind of life is this? A life her

grandfather was trying to change — for Noa and every other Israeli citizen.

Fast forward: Eileen Atkins reads the abridgment of A.S. Byatt's latest novel, "Babel Tower" (4 hours, \$23.50, Random House), the continuation of the story of Frederica, an independent young heroine in the Victorian Age.

Recorded Books has done a two-voice recording of the father-and-son sailing book, "My Old Man and the Sea" (7.75 hours, \$13.50 rental and \$49 purchase; phone 800-638-1304), by David and Daniel Hays. George Guidall and Jeff Woodman narrate this story of both a voyage around Cape Horn in a small boat and a father and son's journey to a better relationship.

Philosopher and psychologist Michael Lerner writes about cynicism and contemporary American politics in "The Politics of Meaning" (abridged to 3 hours, \$16.95, HighBridge), which he narrates. He proposes as an alternative a "detailed plan for a politics of heart and spirit."

Audio Renaissance has produced an abridgment of Melissa Fay Greene's "The Temple Bombing" (6 hours, \$24.95), read by Charles Cioffi. It is the story of the 1958 bombing of the Reform Jewish synagogue in Atlanta.