

# Above average author



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Garrison Keillor appears at a Rochester, Minn., event last year. He is coming to speak Tuesday at the University of Nevada, Reno.

## 'Companion' host produces a series of DVDs

BY FRAZIER MOORE  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — A key to storytelling is a sense of place.

TV viewers know this, whether they're visiting placid Mayberry or wallowing in the debauchery of Wisteria Lane.

But radio can create a sense of place that's all the more vivid for its absence of visual form. Just ask fans of "A Prairie Home Companion," which for 30 years has transported them to the realer-than-real haven of Lake Wobegon, Minn., courtesy of host Garrison Keillor, its enduring bard.

No plasma screen is needed to enjoy the hi-def experience Keillor invokes live for two hours every weekend on nearly 600



RGJ FILE  
Garrison Keillor rehearses before his 1999 performance of "A Prairie Home Companion" at Lawlor Events Center.

### KEILLOR IN RENO

**ENGAGEMENT:** In "An Evening with Garrison Keillor," the storyteller takes the stage at 7 p.m. Tuesday in Nightingale Concert Hall at the University of Nevada, Reno. Details: 784-6847 or (800) 225-2277. Cost: \$85 and \$100.

**"PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION":** Hear it at 6 p.m. today and noon Sunday on KUNR 88.7 FM.

public radio stations (check local listings).

But among 4 million "Prairie Home Companion" listeners, quite a number by now might be reasonably interested in putting a face to Keillor's euphonious voice, and to get a look at how he and his troupe stage this music-and-humor show each week.

Offering such a glimpse is "The 30th Broadcast Season Celebration" DVD, which captures in sound and in video, too, the show's anniversary edition as it took place last summer from St. Paul's Fitzgerald Theater, longtime "Prairie Home Companion" home.

Keillor would be pleased if you ordered this DVD, though, to be

honest, he hasn't seen it.

"Except some baseball, I haven't watched television in 20 years," he said. Why then would he make an exception to watch, of all things, himself?

"Anything that's visual is really fixed in time. But the audio medium is very, very fluid," he muses over fried eggs, corned beef hash and home fries in a Manhattan coffee shop one recent morning.

"In late middle age, which is where I am now," said the 62-year-old Keillor in his unhurried cadence, "you start coming around to the certain burden of what you've done before. But in radio, no. You are perpetually young. You are perpetually starting over new, in radio. I don't know what I'm talking about, but these are really good potatoes."

A fine breakfast indeed, conceivably improvable only by Powdermilk Biscuits, one of the mythical "Prairie Home Companion" sponsors which, as Keillor has told his listeners too many times to count, "gives shy persons the strength to get up and do what needs to be done."

If Keillor isn't one of those shy people, he surely represents them.

SEE KEILLOR ON 4E

4E

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL/RGL.COM

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2005

## Keillor/Author stays near his make-believe town

From 1E

Raised in Anoka, Minn., a small town outside Minneapolis, he embodies heartland reserve, even while he is amused by that same reserve in others. His bulldogish face prefers a deadpan expression. He reacts with discomfort at praise for his

work, dismissing it as "a man talking slow."

Already a staffer at Minnesota Public Radio, Keillor unveiled "A Prairie Home Companion" on July 6, 1974. The show's format and folkloric flavor were inspired by "Grand Ole Opry" radiocasts. But, as time and a devoted following have demonstrated,

"A Prairie Home Companion" is no knockoff or parody, but one of a kind. Keillor insists there's no formula to the program, which went national in 1980.

"Formula would ascribe too much planning, it would make it seem rational," he said, "which it's not. It's intuitive. The show is an evolution of

a number of different radio genres: a musical-variety show" — whose rustic pickers and fiddlers join luminaries like Willie Nelson and opera soprano Renee Fleming — "combined with elements of sketch comedy, and then a little section of verbal meandering." And what of that "verbal meandering"? Better known as

"the news from Lake Wobegon," each 20-minute monologue melds currency with timelessness as Keillor channels the likes of Thornton Wilder and Mark Twain in his sonorous, ear-massaging baritone. He is nourished by proximity to his make-believe community: He lives in St. Paul

with his third wife, Jenny Lind Nilsson, and their 7-year-old daughter.

Then, come airtime, he shines his observations through the prism of Lake Wobegon, where, as he always concludes, "all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average."