

REVIEW

Keillor: Students should 'revolt against us'

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Garrison Keillor talks about a time and place with such fondness, it makes you nostalgic even if you've never been there. As always, on Tuesday night at the University of Nevada, Reno's Nightingale Concert Hall, he spoke of an America filled with noble people who love their country and stand together,

even if they don't like each other much.

Keillor teaches his little history and civics lessons with great humor. You could see that the moment he stepped on stage, wearing a black tux, red tie and red tennis shoes. Later, when he sat and



AP FILE

Keillor

crossed his legs, you could glimpse bright red socks. He opened with a sort of cowboy song filled with whoops and yips and references to Reno.

"I wear a suit with not a speck of manure. I sit at a desk and write liter-at-ture," he sang.

Listening to his sonorous voice on "The Prairie Home Companion" radio show, I never pictured him as an expressive man, but he punctuated his stories of the

solid Lutherans of Lake Wobegon with smirks, grins and expansive hand gestures.

His visit was part of the seventh year of the Forum for Excellence — a fund-raiser for the College of Liberal Arts, and Keillor focused often on education. When an audience member asked about Keillor's advice to students, he suggested they "revolt against us for their

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Keillor/He sang songs

From 1E
own good."

"My advice is simple: I recommend they go out and get a good education and not the one offered to them necessarily," Keillor said. "We've cut a lot of corners. We have shortchanged our young people in a lot of ways. We offered them practical skills and don't offer them a good education."

In response to another question, he said he feels a responsibility to pass on his experiences. However, he said, there comes a time when your audience's eyes glaze over and they start to look at their watches, "then it's time to bring in vulgarity. And nudity."

The things that make Keillor so distinctive are his way with words and that particular cadence that is the vocal equivalent of someone at the wheel slowing down and speeding up with no apparent consideration for the traffic signs.

He had no notes and, at points, spoke quietly and slowly like he might be trying to think of what to say next. But after more than one and one-half hours, I realized all the tangents — about the harsh winters of his childhood, when feral cocker spaniels roamed and Florian and Myrtle Krebsbach, married 50 years and picking fights with each other for amusement — are well planned and cohesive.

The concert was bookended with song. First, Keillor was choirmaster as he led the crowd in "America the Beautiful." It was a moment that made us feel we aren't that removed from an America that once was. The last song was a hymn Keillor said he modified in honor of his "crazy" Aunt Eva.

"You're good singers, you know that?" he said. "You could almost be Lutheran."