



FILE PHOTO

Garrison Keillor was surrounded by fans during a visit to Madison in 2001, when he read some of his material and chatted with the crowd at the Orpheum Theatre. The well-known author and humorist also presented his weekly "A Prairie Home Companion" radio program here that year and again in 2004. He will do so again today in a sold-out performance at the Overture Center.

Keillor is branching out

By Aaron Nathans

The Capital Times

Garrison Keillor has been a busy man lately. He's writing a screenplay for Robert Altman, starting up a weekly newspaper column, editing a book of poems and, yes, running a radio program.

Keillor brings his long-running show, "A Prairie Home Companion," to the Overture Center for a live broadcast this afternoon. Guests include Ale Moller and Aly Bain, the Wallin' Jennys, and 17-year-old Milwaukee fiddler Ben Sanders. Tickets are sold out.

Keillor said in an interview Friday that he deeply loves radio, but has always wanted to write a screenplay. Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, Lindsay Lohan, Woody Harrelson and Keillor himself are lined up to act in the film, which will be about the last live broadcast of a long-running radio show.

He also said he has longed to write a newspaper column, which will begin this summer. (He said a 750 word column is "like a sonnet.") After Dave Barry retired, Tribune Media Services called Keillor to fill in the humor gap.

He'll also release a collection of poems called "Good Poems for Hard Times" this fall.

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No tickets left for show today

spend your early years kind of waiting for the phone to ring. Young writers sit around and wait for opportunity to come. There's a lot of waiting," he said. "So when it comes knocking, your inclination is to say yes, having worked so long."

In a recent column in The Nation magazine, the Minnesota humorist said he loves to experience different kinds of radio. The deregulation of radio has endangered variety, he said.

"If you're driving around the country, if your niche is alternative Tex-Mex punk hip-hop, you're just going to stay with it all across the country. You're never going to experience America," Keillor said. He admires the liberal Air America Radio, but doesn't listen to it because he does not need to listen to viewpoints with which he agrees.

Last year, he released a book called "Homegrown Democrat." Nevertheless, he said it was no calamity having Republicans in power. It has been coming for some time, and will take a while to pass, he said.

He expressed respect for President Bush. The fact that Bush is not

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articulate does not make him any less intelligent, Keillor said. "His policy in the Middle East, I give him credit for being very bold," he said.

He termed Ronald Reagan "a man of genial nature."

Democrats never gave him enough credit for his work on arms control and bringing the message of freedom to the Soviet Union, Keillor said.

He had some kind advice for the many young artists in Madison, waiting for the phone to ring: Enjoy your experience. It will make you happier and improve the art, he said.

"You have to do things that are fun. Don't suffer unnecessarily."

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