

Garrison Keillor's unique storytelling takes Kirby crowd back in time

By Alexander Choman
Citizens' Voice Arts Critic

One of America's most distinctive voices of the radio airwaves, Garrison Keillor brought his inimitable style of wit and humor to the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts Tuesday night in a 90-minute show before an audience of 1,400 people.

Keillor is an author, humorist, musician and radio personality. He eloquently paints pictures with words and his audience responds enthusiastically.

Keillor's rich-timbered voice makes him an impressive elocutionist. Tuesday night's dissertation on the Kirby Center stage included hymns, comedic

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quips and drawn-out stories with a series of diversionary sidebars.

They weren't necessarily digressions, but somehow related sub-plots within the main context.

At any rate, they worked effectively as he talks about religion, relationships and an array of interesting characters from his hometown of Lake Wobegon, Minn.

Dressed as he is eccentrically in a crumpled coat, pants, shirt and tie topped off with bright red colored sneakers, Keillor began his charming soliloquy pacing back and forth across the Kirby Center stage throughout the night. He stops,

ponders, makes hand gestures and, like magic, picks just the right colorful descriptors out of thin air that fixate his listeners on every word.

Keillor is architect of the enormously popular Prairie Home Companion heard on National Public Radio (locally on WVIA FM 89.9).

The show features storytelling, music, jokes and the cast of various characters Keillor has developed over the 31 years the show has been produced.

Keillor has been America's favorite living room guest since Prairie Home Companion first went on the air in 1974 in Minnesota. His distinctive

voice is as comforting as it is amusing as it reaches from the radio speakers inviting listeners to pull up a comfortable chair and settle in for a few hours.

Much like his radio show (Prairie Home Companion), Keillor's success on stage emanates from his ability to make the listener feel like he's talking directly with them, not at them. Keillor struck home many times throughout his appearance eliciting generous laughter and applause.

Keillor's nostalgic prose took the Kirby Center audience on a trip back in time to Lake Wobegon. And as Keillor's elders pointed out to him growing up, "Things always could be worse."

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