

Garrison Keillor's style goes beyond live radio

BY JILL DUMAN
Special to The Bee

To most people, Garrison Keillor is synonymous with "A Prairie Home Companion," the National Public Radio show that has been on the air for more than three decades and inspired the 2006 Robert Altman movie. But Keillor, 68, is also a brilliant writer who has been a regular contributor to the Atlantic Monthly, the New Yorker and Salon.com.

He has written more than a dozen books, offered political commentary and penned a tongue-in-cheek advice column. Keillor's blend of wry description, spot-on observation and Everyman empathy have helped him carve out a niche in American culture, even though he is best known for radio, a medium that seems old-fashioned in the age of the iPod.

Keillor brings his take on Americana to Sacramento's Community Center Theater on Thursday. It will be his fourth visit to the Sacramento area in seven years. (A scheduled September 2009 appearance at Memorial Auditorium was canceled after Keillor suffered a minor stroke.)

"A Prairie Home Companion" airs locally on Sacramento's Capital Public Radio outlets at 6 p.m. Saturdays on KXPR (88.9 FM) and noon Sundays on KXJZ (90.9 FM). A live video feed of the Oct. 21 show can be

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Keillor: Adopted pen name in junior high

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seen in high definition at local movie theaters. For a list of participating theaters, go to <http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/features/live-in-hd/map/>.

Here are five things even devoted listeners may not know about the man who introduced the world to the fictional Lake Wobegon.

1. His real name isn't Garrison and his popular radio show wasn't always called "A Prairie Home Companion."

Garrison Keillor was born Gary Edward Keillor. He adopted the pen name "Garrison Edward" while writing for his junior high school in Anoka, Minn., because he considered it grander for a writer. His flagship radio show "A Prairie Home Companion" - a fictional account of small-town Midwestern life based on Keillor's hometown of Anoka - began in 1969 as a morning radio show on Minnesota Public Radio. It morphed into a live broadcast variety show in 1974, ended in 1987, and returned in a new version in 1989 as "American Radio

AN EVENING WITH GARRISON KEILLOR

When: 8 p.m. Thursday
Where: Community Center Theater, 1301 L St., Sacramento
Tickets: \$49-\$57
Information: (800) 225-2277, (916) 808-5181, www.tickets.com

Show of the Air." "A Prairie Home Companion" returned to its original name in 1993, the same year Keillor began a daily poetry radio feature called "A Writer's Almanac."

2. He's not just a Midwestern boy.

Keillor began his career writing for the New Yorker, has lived part-time in the Big Apple for years and owns a home there. Keillor now lives in St. Paul, Minn., with his third wife, violinist Jenny Lind Nilsson. A 2006 New York Times article described the couple's St. Paul home as "a great Georgian pile atop the swankiest neighborhood in town, with 13-foot ceilings, seven bedrooms and a circular staircase." The article valued Keillor's two-bedroom home in New York's Central Park West at \$3.5 million.

3. Keillor was turned down for his first maga-

zine job.

The Atlantic Monthly took a pass on hiring Keillor, who came to New York on a bus in 1966 after graduating with an English degree from the University of Minnesota. ("I think they could tell I was somebody who had just changed in a public restroom," Keillor told an interviewer in 1997). Keillor eventually ended up writing for the New Yorker - from his home on a farm south of Freeport, Minn. Keillor left the magazine when Tina Brown took over as editor in 1992. His inspiration for "A Prairie Home Companion" came while researching a New Yorker essay about the Grand Ole Opry.

4. There are 28 years between Keillor's two children.

Keillor's oldest child, Jason Peter O'Bleness Keillor, the son of his first

wife, Mary Guntzel, is 41 and works for his father's radio production company. His second child, Maia Grace Keillor, 12, is the daughter of his most recent marriage. Keillor, who was 55 when Maia was born, said of his older-father status: "My old pals will be sending me postcards from the Aegean, Christmas cards about their grandkids and their prostates ... and I'll be standing in the back of Miss Laurie's dance recital, watching my little girl interpret the Waltz of the Flowers."

5. You can ask radio host Keillor questions via the Web.

Go to the official Prairie Home website at <http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/> and click on "Post to the Host" to ask Keillor a question about the writing life, the radio life, Lake Wobegon, Guy Noir or anything else. Adding your name and last initial gives the show permission to read your question on the air. The website also contains details of recent and upcoming shows, as well as the opportunity to listen to a recent show you may have missed.