


Keillor to settle in for an evening of storytelling

IF YOU GO
What: "An Evening with Garrison Keillor"
When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in downtown Appleton
Tickets: \$35 and up
Contact: 920-730-3760
On the Web: Fox Cities Performing Arts Center at www.foxcitiespac.com; On Facebook: Fox Cities Performing Arts Center



Kara Patterson
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Words of Art

When Radio Hall of Famer Garrison Keillor visits venues like the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in downtown Appleton, he often takes a solo seat on stage.

Places like these, where Keillor says he feels "freer than a person can feel on the radio," become testing grounds for stories Keillor says he someday might tell on


his highly acclaimed National Public Radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion."

The Minnesota-born Keillor returns Tuesday to the PAC, where he appeared in 2009 and 2007. I chatted with him about his take on storytelling and the latest news from the fictional Lake Wobegon of "A Prairie Home Companion" fame.

Q: Do you see storytelling as a fading art in this high-tech age?

Keillor: I think that storytelling adapts very well to the high-tech. All of these wondrous inventions allow people to text each other and attach photographs and it's only technology, it doesn't affect the in-

herent interest of what's taken place. I sat on a bus (recently) riding from Texas to Alabama and the musicians were in wild good form and playing music as we were bumping wildly on this very rough road through Louisiana at 2, 3 in the morning. I took pictures of it and I recorded a little bit of it ... and I wrote a few paragraphs about it and I sent it off to five or six people. Now that's a kind of storytelling. We don't need to have a porch and a rocking chair. And the only thing that we require is that we're curious about the lives of the people around us, and we realize that even people whom we



Garrison Keillor

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have known for years and years and years are still full of mystery. That's the appeal of storytelling.

Q: What can audience members expect during "An Evening with Garrison Keillor?"

Keillor: I may sing some sonnets that I wrote ... just to start the evening on kind of a high note, and then we can wander on from there. This is sort of a leisurely meander. I often wind up coming back to talking about my childhood. I grew up adoring my aunts, who were the people in my family who showed affection openly. So I gravitated toward my aunts, and my aunts were the storytellers. My aunts were the historians of the family, and so it dawned on me when I was a very little boy that there was a whole vast time before my time, and this history was populated by real people with their own peculiarities not so different from us.

Q: When you created Lake Wobegon, how did you populate that community? Was it from that sense of history or more from your imagination?

Keillor: I populated it mostly with my relatives, but I didn't want to be too specific. They were uncomfortable enough about my doing shows. We were not brought up to perform in public. And then they realized that I was telling stories about a small town and they were suspicious. My old relatives, they're all gone now, but I noticed when I went to family dinners and our big family Thanksgiving and weddings and funerals that people got quiet when I

came by. They didn't want to divulge anything with me there to hear it. So I was circumspect and I tried not to put them in directly, but some people I have.

Q: What are some of the themes that come forth when you think about some of the things that happen in this fictional place?

Keillor: I'm 69 years old and so I have a very different perspective from what I did when I started out. I was 32. But I don't mourn that change. I like the time that I'm living in right now, so I think I will always talk about the 18-year-olds who are just leaving Lake Wobegon. We are an exporter of people by and large and our children who we love and who we educate and who we bring up as best we can are most of them bound for other places, and we know that, and that's melancholy knowledge. But there are stories that come back from Lake Wobegon exiles and I like to tell those, people who have gone off to Los Angeles and New York and Chicago and what's become of them, and what the people at home think of them. And how do the grandparents try to hold their own in this atmosphere? How does an old man... tell them where they came from, which is a person's duty, I think, to tell our own history. We owe this to our children and to our grandchildren. How to do it? One way to do it is by... making up gaudy stories. Hmm. I try not to do that.

— Kara Patterson's Words of Art column focuses on Fox Valley arts each Sunday. She's reachable at 920-993-1000, ext. 215, or kpatterson@postcrescent.com.