

● MOVIES ● ART ● MUSIC ● WINERIES ● THINGS TO DO ● BOOKS ● COVER STORY ● FESTIVALS ● THEATER ●

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

In rare form

Garrison Keillor brings his unique style of Midwestern personality, poetry and humor to intimate Shryock show

BY JOE SZYNKOWSKI
FOR THE SOUTHERN

If you have listened to "A Prairie Home Companion" on National Public Radio then you know the source of the deep voice and even deeper laughs. They belong to none other than Garrison Keillor, the mind and pen behind the show that draws more than four million weekly listeners. This Grammy-winning member of the Radio Hall of Fame will be in Carbondale later this month to weave his wit, music, poetry and storytelling into a thoughtfully side-splitting show. Keillor, 69, recently took a brief break from finishing his latest novel to talk with the Flipside about his trademark red sneakers, his upcoming solo show at Shryock, and everything else in between.

Flipside: You performed to a sell-out crowd at Shryock in 2009 and are

now back by popular demand. What do you recall most about Carbondale?

Keillor: I remember driving across the prairie country, kind of the flat country past corn stubble and houses. It was a nice area to drive. If I recall correctly I drove down from St. Louis over that old magnificent bridge.

FS: I heard you made quite an impression on a group of SIU students, taking them out to eat with you at Italian Village after the show.

GK: They just stood there looking hungry, so I invited them out. They were interesting, lively people. I wonder if they're still there. I don't get the chance to hang out with people in their early 20s very often.

FS: Do you enjoy the more intimate shows like the one you will be performing at Shryock?

GK: Yeah, it's an entirely different drill. With the

radio show, I'm working with actors and a band. Everything is planned out. I write scripts, we stand around microphones holding pieces of paper in our hands. When it's just me there is no need for a script. I just sit in a room and kind of launch into it.

FS: So doing these types of shows kind of keeps you on your toes?

GK: By the time you get to

my stage in life, whatever that might be called, pre-geriatric or twilight years, life gets kind of predictable. You spend more and more time with the people you've known for a long time. You already know a lot of their stories, and you know them a little too well. They call you sir, they call you Mr. Keillor. Life loses a lot of its challenge, I think. You have

to create challenges for yourself. And that's my challenge, to walk out on stage with no plan and do something amusing.

FS: Do you get a different feel from the crowds during the more intimate shows? I imagine you can read their reactions better when they're physically closer to you.

GK: You can definitely see the people, and they're

very interesting to watch. The last time I was out, I think in Milwaukee, I was way down on the stage, where I usually stand. The people in the front row have to look all the way up to see me, which is not the greatest view. I saw this man in his mid-40s, dressed in an ordinary way in a jacket and jeans.

SEE KEILLOR / PAGE 8

Southeastern Illinois College
Visual & Performing Arts Center
Presents

BIG RIVER

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCK FINN



SERGIO'S
MEXICAN BAR & GRILL

Come Enjoy The Patio

Weekend Special
Friday - Saturday - Sunday

- \$5.99 Beer Pitchers
- \$10.00 Margarita Pitchers
- \$5.99 Coronita Buckets Sat. Only

DAILY SPECIALS

Monday - Thursday
Lunch \$5 • Dinner \$7

● MOVIES ● ART ● MUSIC ● WINERIES ● COVER STORY ● BOOKS ● FESTIVALS ●

KEILLOR: Coming to Shryock Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 24

FROM PAGE 7

He was absolutely shaking with laughter. Next to him sat his two sullen teenage daughters. They were clearly embarrassed by how much he was enjoying the show, which they couldn't quite figure out.

FS: When something like that happens, do you interact with the crowd or do you stick to your guns?

GK: I don't really have any guns to stick to in those kinds of shows. In that instance, I really didn't know how to turn things into the direction of whatever would be considered interesting to a teenage girl. I just kind of keep bouncing along. I talk a lot about Lake Wobegon and growing up in a small town in Minnesota. Beyond that I talk a little bit about myself and my college days, leaving for New York hoping to land a job and living in squalor and poverty for part of a summer.

FS: Speaking of your past, can you talk about how you landed your first professional radio job? (Minnesota Public Radio, 1969)

GK: When I was in college, I had a job as a parking lot attendant, which in Minnesota can be a painful, painful job. You can't wear gloves because you need to make change with the coin changer. It's bitterly cold. You're young and cool, so you're not really dressed for the weather. You're just freezing to death out there. It was during that time that I coveted an indoor job. I saw that they were holding auditions for an announcer position and I thought having listened to the radio, I could fake that pretty well. You listen to those guys and just have to learn the slightly pompous news-reading style that was in fashion back then. So I got the job.

FS: So five years later you started "A Prairie Home Companion"...was there a

turning point in the history of the show that really helped it explode in popularity?

GK: I'd say it was when I wrote a book called "Lake Wobegon Days" in the mid-1980s. A lot of people started noticing the book and the audiences grew. That was sort of the big break. And then with my exquisite sense of timing, I left the show so I could become a great American novelist. That lasted me about six or seven months before I came weaseling back.

FS: Can you tell me about the red socks and red shoes? They've kind of become your trademark haven't they?

GK: I started wearing red socks as an homage to Studs Terkel, a radio personality in Chicago. Then one day, I got tired of wearing black wingtips and I just put on a pair of red sneakers. They just seemed so much lighter. You feel heavier as you get older, and you have to shed some

of that and throw it overboard. I threw my wingtips overboard.

FS: We know you're kind of a jack of all trades with the writing, radio skills, humor, voiceover work. Which do you enjoy most and why?

GK: I'm a writer and that's really what I've done since high school. It's what I do every day. It's really a remarkable thing to have something you've been so loyal to for 50 years, and something that you derive the same amount or even more pleasure from as times goes by.

FS: How is your health? (Keillor suffered a minor stroke in September 2009.)

GK: It was one of those little things that really leaves you feeling dislocated. I drove myself to the hospital, which probably wasn't a good idea, but I remember reciting a couple of my long poems along the way to make sure I could still function. I guess it landed in what neurologists call a silent part of the brain where not much is going on. Some of us probably have more of that than others ... I was very lucky.

FS: When something like that happens, do you think about retiring?

GK: I kind of brought it up about a year ago but haven't really thought about it too much ever since. It seems to me that overworking is soothing for some people. I have been working very, very hard for about the last couple of decades and during that time I have been free of depression and high anxiety. I know people who are retired who suffer from depression. I'm not saying it's that way for everybody, but maybe some of us just need to keep pulling the plow.



HE'S BACK...

the BIG MUDDY MONSTER BREW FEST

OCTOBER 22, 2011
1PM TO 4PM
RIVERSIDE PARK
MURPHYSBORO, IL

CRAFT BEER TASTING FROM OVER 25 MIDWESTERN BREWERIES • SANCTIONED HOME BREW CONTEST • LIVE MUSIC • GREAT LOCAL FOOD • VINTAGE BASEBALL

RAIN OR SHINE. TICKETS NON-REFUNDABLE.
PURCHASE TICKETS:
ABC LIQUOR MART • SOUTHERN ILLINOIS LIQUOR MART • WAREHOUSE LIQUOR MART. BY PHONE 618-458-6000 OR ONLINE AT SouthernTicketsOnline.com

SAVE 5% ONLINE PROMO CODE: SUDS

Friend us! [The Southern thesouthern](http://www.facebook.com/thesouthern)

WWW.BIGMUDDYMONSTERBREWFEEST.COM