

ON STAGE

## Garrison Keillor pursues solo entertaining

Host of 'A Prairie Home Companion' appearing at Cobb Energy Centre.

By Bo Emerson  
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For 43 years the crusty, soft-spoken Garrison Keillor entered living rooms and car stereos of millions of Americans as the host and leading light of the Minnesota Public Radio program, presenting a weekly dose of down-home comedy, music and the stories of a once-and-future middle America called Lake Wobegon.

In 2016, Keillor hosted his final episode of "A Prairie Home Com-

panion," leaving the show in the able hands of host, and mandolin genius, Chris Thile. These days, Keillor is pursuing a solo life, appearing at engagements around the country, such as the one that brings him to Cobb Energy Centre on Thursday.

Recently, he took a moment to respond to a few email questions about his new life.

**As far as your fondness for performing is concerned, will your solo gigs make up for your disappearance from the weekly show "A Prairie Home Companion," or are you homesick**

**Keillor continued on D2**



Lindsay Lohan (from left), Garrison Keillor and Maya Rudolph appear in "A Prairie Home Companion." MELINDA SUE GORDON / PICTUREHOUSE



Garrison Keillor will bring his solo show to Cobb Energy Centre on Thursday. MCT FILE PHOTO

## Keillor

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### for that part of your life?

I like the solo life. It's a big adventure. You walk out on stage and get to improvise freely, change course, throw in non sequiturs, make sharp left turns, whereas the weekly show was more like the circus. The rigging had to go up, and the elephants come in at the right time, the balancing hippopotamus, the flying squirrels, etc. At Atlanta, however, I have my favorite duet partner, (singer) Heather Masse, and our pianist, Richard Dworsky, so it's not solo.

### You offered a memorable (and somewhat pejorative) description of George W. Bush in "Homegrown Democrat," a book that put your political beliefs on display. Have you experienced any nostalgia for the Bush era?

I notice that Mr. Bush is stepping back into public view. I don't feel nostalgia yet – I'll let you know. I always thought Laura was the one who should've been president. She is a very classy Texas woman.

### Storytelling, it seems, had much to do with the last election. President Don-

### ald Trump created a convincing narrative about the state of the union. The Democrats did not develop a successful competing narrative. As a storyteller, what advice would you offer to the Democratic party?

Wait. By October the party will be looking much better. We have a bedrock belief in a decent society in which everyone's kids have a crack at an excellent education, people get the health care they need, people are treated fairly regardless of their oddities, and you don't get so bogged down trying to get the necessities that you can't lift up your head and admire the stars and enjoy God's great creation including your own family. It's not about fear, it's about the good life and making room for the miraculous.

### Will you offer any songs to the audience at the Cobb Energy Centre?

At my show, we have a singing intermission, the only one in captivity. The audience stands, those who wish to step out can do that, and the others stay. And we all sing (a cappella) one song after another that everyone knows the words to by heart. This may not be possible in another 20 years. I don't think schools are teaching children

those songs, like "America" and "America the Beautiful" and "John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt" and "Amazing Grace" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." So this is a large moment for everyone, especially the teens in the room – they're stunned at how much everyone knows. Even the "He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat" verse of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" – even in Georgia.

### You've featured the late Georgia Tech professor and poet, Thomas Lux, on "Writer's Almanac." Do you have any thoughts about his passing and his impact on American letters?

He was a rare poet who dared to be funny, at a time when all serious poets worked hard to be cryptic.

### How long will it take you to learn to play mandolin as well as Chris Thile?

I'll take too long, and meanwhile I have plenty of work to do, so probably I would only have time to become mediocre, and America does not need another mediocre mandolin player. I have – without exactly intending to – become rather unique, and I'd rather be that.