

# FIRST STOP ON HIS LAST TOUR

GARRISON KEILLOR TO TAKE THE STAGE TONIGHT AT PAC

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USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

When author and humorist Garrison Keillor flew to Appleton in 2009 to broadcast his "A Prairie Home Companion" public radio show live, he opened with the song "There's no first class to Appleton."

This time around, he's taking a bus.

Keillor and his Prairie Home "Love and Comedy Tour" arrive today at the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, the first stop in a 28-city, six-week tour that will hit both coasts via coach.

"We tried doing a tour by plane once, and it was just so complicated and rough on the road crew," he said. "Bus

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## If you go

**What:** Garrison Keillor's Prairie Home "Love and Comedy" Tour

**Description:** "Two-plus hours of stories, love duets, family drama, poetic outbursts and our famous Singing Intermission, featuring The Old Scout, Garrison Keillor, with the extraordinary Heather Masse, sound-effects genius Fred Newman, Richard Dworsky and the exemplary Road Hounds."

**When:** 7:30 p.m. tonight

**Where:** Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, 400 W. College Ave., Appleton

**Tickets:** Start at \$35. Ticketmaster, PAC ticket office or 920-730-3760

COURTESY OF PRAIRIE HOME PRODUCTIONS  
Garrison Keillor will take the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center stage one more time on Tuesday.

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## Keillor

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travel is really slick." Appleton's billing as the tour's first stop was a matter of geographical luck.

"We're starting from St. Paul, Minnesota, and you're in the direction we're heading," he said. "Plus, you know it's a great part of Wisconsin. We've done shows there. We know the people are well-behaved and they come appropriately dressed. They don't wave signs. They don't carry on."

That seems to be a big plus in our column.

The Minnesota native turned 75 on Monday, and he isn't carrying on much about the milestone.

His wife is traveling out east and his daughter is at summer camp. He packed his red socks and boarded a bus on his birthday.

Keillor has gotten rousing receptions in Appleton in his four visits over the last decade, from an appearance with the Fox Valley Symphony — he donated his fee back to the orchestra — to the live radio show and several subsequent shows that weren't broadcast.

Tonight's performance here is basically a recreation of his "A Prairie Home Companion," the show he led for 42 years before turning it over to new host Chris Thile last year.

Keillor lets out a deep baritone gasp when asked if he prefers being compared to Brett Favre or Curt in his ping-pong retirement plans. As recently as 2015 he said in interviews that his current tour was his last go-round.

He's saying that again. "A person should be careful in saying it's the last one, but this one really is the last," he said.

"I'm happy for it to wind up. When you have been extremely lucky and you have made your way for so long on the basis of no perceptible talent at all, you shouldn't try to overstay your welcome. You should know when to sit down. And I believe I do know when to sit down."

He said he found out that he has no interest in general travel, like going to the beach or Florida. But there's a draw to travel to meet distant family, people like his cousin's children.

"I'm a stranger to my own family. It's just the price you pay in this profession. I'm not a stranger to my children or a stranger to my wife, but to my relatives. I see them at funerals, and that's about it."

The reason to do this last tour is mostly because there isn't anything else like it, and he believes it's worth the effort.

It has terrific music and a man telling a long story and silly nonsense with sound effects. The variety show is perpetually in danger because it's commercially a little bit fragile. But I love variety shows. I would love to go to a show in which there's a yodeler followed by somebody who juggles cats and somebody who plays 'Beyond the Sunset' on a trombone. That's my sort of show."

That isn't what this show is about.

He'll bring updates from his mythical Minnesota hometown, Lake Wobegon, "where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking and all the children are above average."

He'll have music and skits, like Gay Noir and Lives of the Cowboys.

The material is all new. I sing duets with Heather Masse, a tall woman, as tall as I, so we look each other in the eye. We sing these lovely love duets, "Unchained Melody" and Bob Dylan love songs and Van Morrison. I sing a love song to my daughter, who is now 19. There are no guests. It's just us.

Besides Keillor and Masse, he has longtime sound effects genius Fred Newman and musical accompaniment by Richard Dworsky and the Rood Hounds.

"The news from Lake Wobegon is maybe a little bit longer because it's about the first girl I ever loved, and you know one does not want to rush through a story like that," he said.

Since leaving the live radio show in July 2016, he's been writing. His Lake Wobegon screenplay is now in its fifth or sixth rewrite, and he's writing a memoir and a collection of limericks.

He continues to pen a weekly syndicated newspaper column that frequently skewers President Donald Trump. There's none of that onstage.

He believes that wouldn't be right when people have paid for tickets.

"There's no way to do politics on this show. We're past that point. The late-night comics really got a boost out of it, but they're talking to the choir. And I'm not. I have no doubt that Lake Wobegon voted for Donald Trump. I did not. I'm not in a mood to make fun of it."

Instead, he hopes people walk away from the PAC humming.

"One of people's favorite parts of the show is something we never did on the radio and that is to walk out into the crowd with a microphone and simply sing with the audience. America the Beautiful, 'Swing Low Sweet Charlie,' 'Can't Help Falling in Love,' 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.' 'How Great Thou Art.' Whatever songs everybody seems to know," he said.



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