

Garrison Keillor slows down — or so he says

BY MARTIN F. KOHN
Free Press Staff Writer

He may have moved to New York, Garrison Keillor says, but that doesn't mean he's learned to talk fast.

"It's too late for me to talk fast," Keillor says.

In truth, he adds, the older he gets the slower he speaks — possibly because "I have less to say."

Garrison Keillor with less to say? Keillor, the man who brought narrative back to radio? Keillor, the best-selling author of "Lake Wobegon Days," "Leaving Home" and a couple of other books? The prolific magazine writer whose work has appeared, chiefly in the New Yorker, for 20 years? The monologist who's leading "The Sweet Corn Show," a talk-and-music revue, on an 18-city tour this month? That guy?

All right, maybe he has slowed down a tad. "I haven't done much writing," he admits, "for the last four or five days."

Keillor doesn't blame this egregious lapse on all the traveling he's doing. Airplanes are as conducive to writing as any other setting, thanks to his laptop computer, Keillor said.

Nor does he find traveling especially distracting.

"To travel as we're traveling seems very static," he says. "Most hotel rooms are identical. There's a standard style of hotel furniture — not sold in stores" and a standard array of paint colors never seen in homes, not to mention pictures on walls "not meant to be looked at."

Lapse or no, Keillor has been writing. "I'm working on a new novel which has been in the works a long, long time, about the end of radio and the advent of television." The novel is set in Chicago in the '50s. "So far my hero, to my dismay, turns out to be a television guy," a man enjoying "great success." "So far in the novel he's not punished for that."

Keillor is able to tour during the summer because his radio show, "American Radio Company of the Air," is on vacation until Oct. 6. He does 26 radio shows a year, half of them in New York, the other half on the road.

His previous show, "A Prairie Home Companion," usually emanated from Keillor's native Minnesota but also traveled. He gets back to Minnesota "about every other month" to visit relatives and friends, he says.

His "Sweet Corn Show" isn't on radio but it could be, Keillor says. "These are concerts that are meant for people to listen. There's not a great deal to see."

Besides Keillor, the performers to listen to — or see — include guitarist Chet Atkins and his band, Robin &



Garrison Keillor will appear Thursday at Meadow Brook with Chet Atkins.

Linda Williams and Keillor's 21-year-old son, Jason.

"He's a new wave guitarist forced to play in a sweet ballad style. He has to live with his old man's musical shortcomings. He does it well," Keillor says.

ON STAGE: "The Sweet Corn Show," starring Garrison Keillor and Chet Atkins, appears at 8 p.m. Thursday at the Meadow Brook Music Festival, in Rochester. Call 377-2010, 9-9 performance days, 9-6 other days.

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