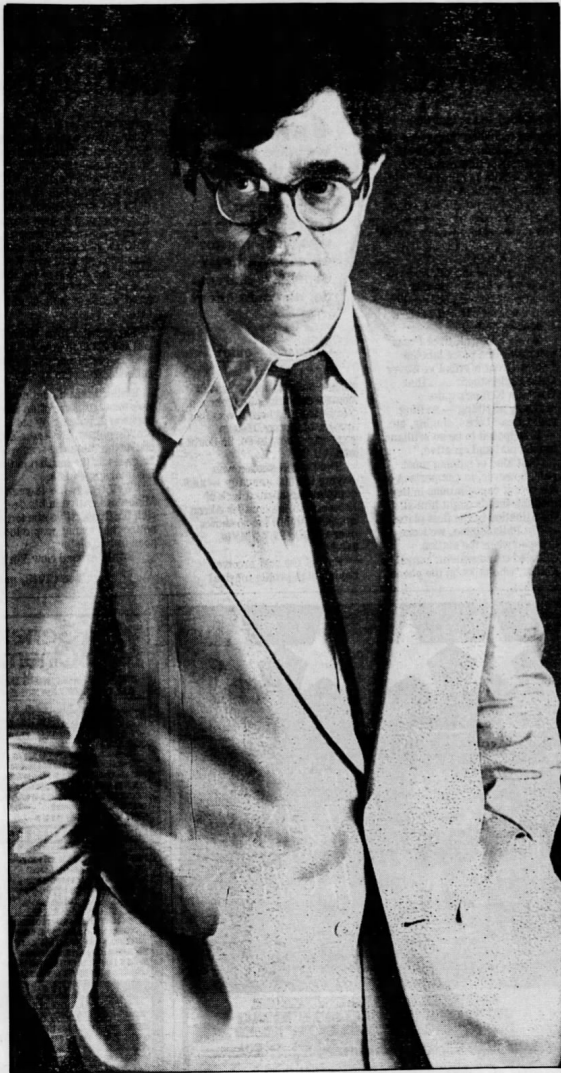


Cover story



Beacon Journal file photo

Garrison Keillor appears Saturday at the sold-out Akron Civic Theatre

Woebegone? Not Keillor

By Bob Dyer
Beacon Journal staff writer

Things just didn't work out when the self-proclaimed "shy person" rode off dramatically to the isolation of Denmark in 1987. He lasted only four months. Things haven't worked out too well since Garrison Keillor's return to the States, either. Of the 288 stations that signed up last year for his new *American Radio Company* show, 77 have since dropped it, including public radio outlets in two of the nation's largest cities, Detroit and Philadelphia. In cities where Keillor is heard, including Akron and Cleveland, audience reaction has been lukewarm. His weekly following, once 5 million people, has plunged to 1.5 million.

So on the surface, at least, these are not the best of times for Garrison Keillor.

But weep not for the man who became a household name during 13 seasons of *A Prairie Home Companion*, the radio program that brought storytelling and subtlety back to a medium in dire need of both.

Today, he's back where he is most comfortable — on the stage, with a live radio audience — and he's having a ball.

He hopes that will be evident Saturday when he entertains 2,700 people at the sold-out Akron Civic Theatre — not to mention the other 1.5 million loyalists.

Keillor claims he hasn't lost a minute of sleep over the big-city defections.

"I don't think about it because it's not really my place to think about it," he said by phone this week from New York, where *American Radio Company* is based. "(Public radio programmers) are all my colleagues, and they have a perfect right to decide on my work — to accept it or turn it down — just as my colleagues at the New Yorker do."

Those magazine editors have seen fit to accept a steady stream of his free-lance articles during the past 20 years. Keillor also has cranked out four

**Garrison Keillor's
American Radio Company**
Where: Akron Civic Theatre,
182 S. Main St.
When: 6 p.m. Saturday
Cost: Tickets are sold out, but
the show will air live over WKSU
(89.7-FM) and WGN (90.3-
FM).
Information: 535-3179

See KEILLOR'S, page D6

Civic sold out for Keillor appearance

Continued from page D6

and I see these stunning young women who are wearing castoffs and stuff they picked up in Army-Navy stores and rummage sales, and I used to imagine I looked pretty good in secondhand clothes. Now I realize that as I get older, I really do have to shave every day, and I really do have to get a haircut every couple of weeks to try to sort of husband whatever is left."

He laughs that contained Midwestern laugh.

"But it's a very fertile and productive time in my experience.

"Doing this Twain show last week (a broadcast from Mark Twain's old house in Connecticut) really encourages you on the subject, because Twain really hit his stride around 50 and went through this phenomenal creative period where he wrote *Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi* and a good deal of other things.

"He was kind of a late starter, Twain was, and his best work really was in his late 40s and 50s."

As Keillor talks about the noted American humorist, you get the distinct impression he's also talking about another noted American humorist.

"Twain sets this wonderful example, of which there are many examples, of the long, productive life. Writers need examples like that. People are sort of fascinated by the examples of the tragic writer who does one notable thing and then runs out of gas. Or," he adds with a slight chuckle, "gets too *much* gas.

"And I think that the press is sort of fascinated by that 'tragic writer' mode. I think the critics are sort of interested in seeing a decline immediately after whatever success they have awarded you. And I don't see it that way.

"So the age of 50 to me —

well, it is the absolute end of anybody's baseball career, even if you're a knuckleball pitcher. But for a writer, it can be a pretty good time.

"I believe it can." □

Make sure your investment program gets started on the right foot. Stay in touch with all the financial markets with the business pages of the daily Beacon Journal.

Pick up a copy at a convenient newsstand or coin box or have The Beacon Journal delivered to your home or office.

Call 996-3600 or
1-800-777-2442
The Beacon Journal