

# Keillor plugs us — honest Barbs are gentle at Civic Theatre

By Bob Dyer  
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At times it was hard to believe that Garrison Keillor's appearance wasn't being underwritten by the Akron Regional Development Board.

There he was Saturday night, cranking out his *American Radio Company* program to 211 stations across the nation, live via a satellite uplink parked behind the Akron Civic Theatre. There he was, with two hours of uninterrupted air time and an audience of 1.5 million.

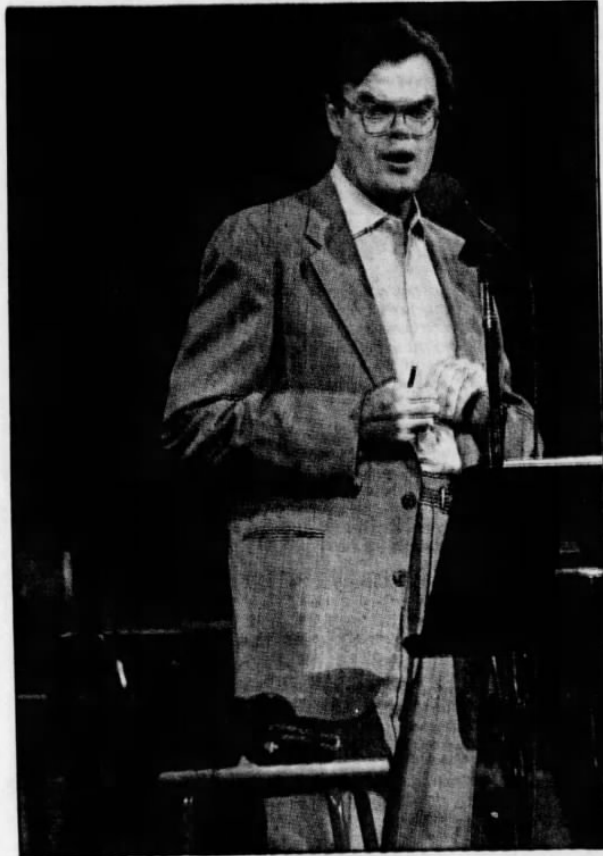
And you know what? The big guy said a whole bunch of nice things about Akron, Ohio.

Well, there was that crack about Akron giving the world rubber checks.

And there was that line about going to

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■ Lyrics to Garrison Keillor's tune about Akron. Page A10.



Beacon Journal photo/Robin Witek

Garrison Keillor at Civic Theatre on Saturday

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# Nation hears Keillor sing Akron's praises, and more

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Akron for the show being comparable to taking the homely girl to the dance, that homely girls tend to be more fun because they have to be.

And, yeah, he did say Akron "gave us the word anachronism, which means 'something from Akron.'"

But the 48-year-old Minnesota native had certainly done his homework. He talked about canals and zippers and bowling and oats and tires — but was well aware that Akron is no longer the Rubber Capital of the World.

"The National Association of Designated Cities stripped Akron of its title," he joked. "What can Akron be the capital of now? . . . the Polymer Research Capital of the World!"

Try to buy an ad like that, ARDB.

Keillor could have resorted to the easy cheap shot. You know, comparing downtown Akron on a Saturday night to Lake Wobegon — the Land That Time Forgot.

On the other hand, the creator of *A Prairie Home Companion* is not the cheap-shot sort. But he could have ignored his surroundings and done a generic show.

Instead, Keillor gabbed about Akron and Ohio all night long. He even penned a song: *Why Akron?* to the tune of the Beach Boys' *Help Me Rhonda*.

As the nation listened, he also told a rambling tale about a fictional (sort of) Ohio State half-back named Herb Gaines, a guy who could do no wrong — "Even people who I never met were good to me, like my physics teacher" — until he broke his ankle. (For the record, things worked out fine. Herb married his college honey and got a lucrative beer distributorship.)

Keillor capped the tale with a rewrite of the OSU fight song: "Mow that yard and rake in fall/ Guard against high terol/ Oh boy in four more years/ Our children will be grown

Not that things started out well. You could almost hear the capacity crowd of 2,700 wince when the first thing out of Keillor's mouth after the "on air" sign lighted was: "From the Akron Civic Center (sic) in Akron, Ohio."

He had come onstage 10 minutes earlier, snaking his way through a bevy of music stands, microphones, stools and speak-

ers. Wearing a gray suit, gray shirt and red tie — which he removed seconds before air time — he chatted easily with the crowd.

The musical portions of the show had a local flavor as well. Clear Fork, a bluegrass quartet containing two Northeast Ohioans, was a last-minute addition to the roster.

Youngstown native Maureen McGovern made a cameo, too, before dashing off to a benefit appearance with the Canton Symphony. She wore a hairdo only slightly longer than Sinéad O'Connor's, earrings the size of chandeliers and a black dress with blinding sequins — "Gives me motion sickness," Keillor quipped. On the second of two songs — a stunning version of the Beatles' *I'll Follow the Sun* — she was accompanied by guitarist Chet Atkins, a former Ohioan who stuck around all night.

Once the national audience departed at 8 p.m., the paying customers and WKSU (89.7-FM) listeners got an encore — Keillor singing *Happy Birthday* to the station, which turned 40 this year.