

RADIO WAVES
Garrison Keillor

Airwaves' Warm Prince Of the Prairie

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FOR ANYONE contemplating the lost Golden Age of Radio in the 1940s and '50s, when the magic of the new medium fired imagination and creativity, **Garrison Keillor** offers a pleasant, undemanding bridge to the past.

His whispery, familiar voice almost single-handedly embodies the spirit of old-style radio, and his weekly, two-hour "American Radio Company" is the first radio variety show to be produced in New York in 40 years.

Keillor, who brings his show to the Berkeley Community Theatre Saturday (**KQED-FM**, 88.5, 3 p.m.) as part of a regular series of road trips, has an inimitable style, homespun and quirky, that tends to inspire either lavish devotion or irritation. Some might find it difficult to take Keillor's voice-from-another-era persona at face value, but a phone conversation with him tends to remove doubt.

"I've been listening to less radio since my car was stolen about three years ago," he says softly. "I like amateurish radio. I like to listen to student stations and I like public radio, especially when they talk to people who don't have their message altogether, do you know what I mean?"

"Most of what you hear on radio sounds awfully canned to me. For the most part the music has passed me by, and I'm sort of embarrassed to be listening to oldie stations. Somehow it just makes me feel sheepish. And so what I really like is talk shows and the various kinds of haranguing that radio does so wonderfully well."

Keillor speaks as fluidly on the phone as he does on the air, but a question about what he thinks of right-wing radio sensation **Rush Limbaugh** draws an uncharacteristic pause.

"Rush Limbaugh?" he asks, the genuine interest and curiosity in his voice conveyed by his absolute equanimity. "Who is that?"

There you have it. Limbaugh, host of the most popular syndicated radio talk show in the country, has attracted so much attention that Republican Presidential aspirant **Pat Buchanan** announced that he would want Limbaugh in his administration. But Keillor insists, even when asked twice, that he has never heard of him; he is, however, happy to discuss Limbaugh once he hears who he is.

"I think the right-wingers are great radio entertainment," he says. "They are real cut-and-slash guys, so they at least sound interesting on the radio. I wouldn't care to get to know them any better. They are not people I would like to go on a long car trip with."

"There is some sort of connection between right-wing radio and rock and roll," he says, chuckling.

"And they really feel it themselves. Buchanan and **David Duke** and **Newt Gingrich** really represent that impulse toward vandalism that most people get over about the time they are in their early 20s, the urge when you go in-




Garrison Keillor, top: Familiar voice; below, Dezo Hoffman's portrait of the Rolling Stones

to a hotel room to, you know, throw all the chairs and everything out into the parking lot. That's basically rock and roll. I think, and in comparison to them, people of the left, counting myself among them, I suppose — no, I don't think so — sort of sound like your high school geography teacher.

Now that he mentions it, Keillor does remind one of a certain kind of high-school teacher, loved by students for his involvement with teaching even as he is made fun of for one or two personal eccentricities. But Keillor, to borrow another image from him, definitely comes across as someone you would quite contentedly join for a car trip somewhere, one that allowed for plenty of friendly, idle musings on the passing scenery and whatever else came up.

Keillor obviously understands that people find him good company, and that many look forward to his weekly shows the way they might look forward to a visit with a treasured aunt or uncle. When he discontinued his earlier variety show, "Prairie Home Companion," after 13 years, the disappointment and dismay were widespread.

After some time off, during which he got married, lived briefly

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in Denmark, then moved to Manhattan and published a new book, Keillor has come back with his new show, now in its third year. He admits that he feels some sense of responsibility to his fans — and fans of his type of show, of which he is one of the few remaining practitioners.

"It's an odd position to be in," he says. "I wish other people would get in the field and relieve me of the responsibility. It's a great little forum for a show, the radio variety show. We put the show together in a couple days, and it usually has a nice, spontaneous feeling to it that is hard to get in television, because television just takes so darn long to block out. I'm not sure anyone does a live show in television. People tell me 'Saturday Night Live' is live, but I don't believe that."

For the record, Keillor does not watch a lot of TV. In fact, he doesn't watch any at all, he says.

"We had a large radio when I was growing up, and this was part of the pleasure of listening to radio then, listening to sound come out of this piece of furniture," he says. "It was like a little cathedral there. The tuning knob was as big as a grapefruit. It had many, many bands on it."

"The shows from all of these different places sounded different... These were voices that were friendly and avoided controversy and tried to hit right in the middle every time, the middle of the road. And you came to feel a real friendship and affection with these peo-

ple. And it, I suppose, gave us a rather sunny view of the world, but so be it. I loved radio a lot, growing up, and a few shows, like 'Fiber McGee and Molly,' were more real to me than most of what was a kind of art. I'm not nostalgic for it... I just enjoy it, that's all."

Rock Photo Exhibit

Sure, a lot of people are tired of radio's continuing emphasis on so-called vintage rock. But count the "Legends of Rock" photo exhibit (co-sponsored by radio station KRQR, 97.3 FM) that opened this weekend at San Francisco's La-

haina Gallery as a look back well worth our while.

What's nice about this display of work by six different photographers is the focus on showing a more intimate side of figures like Jimi Hendrix and Mick Jagger. Dezo Hoffman's shots of the Rolling Stones, especially one of Jagger as a young man thoughtfully rubbing his neck with his fingers, have a vivid, timeless quality to them.

One sequence of three photographs by Henry Diltz shows Hendrix, Michelle Phillips and Mama Cass all on a couch, backstage at the Hollywood Bowl in 1967. Hendrix was opening for the Mamas

and Papas that night, recalled Diltz.

"Jimi was at one end of the couch and Mama Cass was on the other," he said. "He leaned over and whispered something to Michelle and then Michelle leaned over and whispered something to Mama Cass and then she kind of gave Jimi this look like, 'Oh yeah?'"

Also among the 50 images are pictures of Neil Young, James Taylor, Elvis Presley, Keith Richards and Jerry Garcia. The other photographers included are Richard E. Aaron, Harrison Funk, Roger Marshutz, Robert Knight and Michael McCartney (Paul's brother).

"A lot of these musicians loom pretty large in peoples' lives," said Diltz. "These people played the sound tracks to our lives. And these are pretty much candid shots of these people from their real lives, not the kind of stuff you see all the time." For information on the exhibit, which will be open until April 19, call Lahaina Galleries, 749-1000.

Notes
National Public Radio's Nina Totenberg, doyenne of U.S. Supreme Court reporters, gives a noon lecture May 7 in San Francisco at the Grand Hyatt Hotel on Union Square. For information on Totenberg's visit, or Keillor's, call 553-2200.

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