

← Back

# Radio Is 'Home' for Keillor

---

*By Jeff Bahr April 30, 1993 Publication: Omaha World-Herald (NE) Page: 35sf Word Count: 966*

Garrison Keillor said he now is host of "American Radio Company" because he erred in folding "A Prairie Home Companion."

"I changed because I made the terrible mistake of quitting radio," Keillor said from St. Paul, Minn. "It's the dumbest thing I ever did in my life, and I am just now starting to recover from this huge boner.

"I don't know why nobody told me at the time this was the wrong thing to do, but people assumed I knew best. So I walked off the edge of the cliff, and it's taken me a long time to climb back up the rocks."

A void was created in Keillor's life when "A Prairie Home Companion" left the air in 1987. Starting the new show in 1989, though, made his woe be gone. "American Radio Company," now in its fourth season, provides Keillor with much the same outlet.

"So the new show really is simply the old show under a different title with other people, started a year and a half later," he said.

Keillor has a great love for radio.

"It's what I do," said Keillor, who has been credited with helping restore magic to the medium.

The humorist and best-selling author will bring his "American Radio Company" series to Lincoln's Lied Center for Performing Arts Saturday. The program will be broadcast nationwide from the Lincoln facility beginning at 5 p.m.

Tickets to the show are no longer available. Those who are not among the 2,200 ticket holders

may hear the broadcast on Nebraska Public Radio and on Omaha station KIOS - 91.5 FM.

Why is Keillor coming to Lincoln?

"We're coming to celebrate Fertility Day," he said. May 1 is his son's birthday, he said. "So for me that's a personal fertility day."

But for most people the date is a celebration of spring that dates back to the Middle Ages, "especially in England and in Celtic countries, but also in Scandinavia," he said. Those celebrating the day would build a bonfire, erect a May pole, dance around it "and encourage nature to be generous."

He added: "You wouldn't celebrate Fertility Day back in Manhattan. You want to get out someplace where people actually grow things."

Keillor wanted to have a Czech polka band and a children's choir appear on the show. So the lineup will include two Nebraska acts, the Mark Vyhlidal Orchestra and Bonae Cantores, a Lincoln - based children's choir.

Keillor's Lincoln visit will mark the show's second performance in Nebraska in a year and a half. "American Radio Company" traveled to Red Cloud for a performance in December 1991.

Keillor said he enjoyed that visit. "I came and went in a flash, but sometimes those fast visits are all the more memorable."

On the Red Cloud visit, he said, he slept in a mobile home for the first time since he was a youth. He has vivid memories of waking up early that chilly, misty morning to find white - faced cattle in a field behind the mobile home. "I had just flown in the night before from New York," he said, so the sudden transition was startling.

As the program's name implies, Keillor works with members of a regular radio company. The cast of regulars includes actress - singer Ivy Austin, music director Rob Fischer, sound - effects man Tom Keith and actor Bill Parry.

Working with a company is easier than dealing with a revolving cast of guests, Keillor said, because "I'm not good at explaining things." Miss Austin, Keith, Fischer and Parry are familiar enough with the show's routine that "I never have to tell them anything."

Most weeks, Keillor writes everything heard on "American Radio Company."

"Whenever I get material from other people that I like, I always use it," he said. "But we don't have any other writers."

Keillor must devote a good portion of his week to the show. "Not that much, I must say. But I write real hard from about Thursday afternoon through Saturday afternoon. About two days, I write like a steam engine."

The material is written under a number of different names. One of Keillor's pseudonyms is Muriel L. Brubaker, described as America's "most consistently produced playwright. That is, everything she writes goes on the show," Keillor said. "Because she writes so close to deadline, it's too late to get anybody else."

Keillor's other pen names include Norman Conquest, Warren Peace, Natalie Dressed, and Don Wenow and R. Gay Apparel. The show's host also likes to slip other examples of sly humor in the radio dramas and mock commercials. In the show's regular cafe sketch last week, for instance, a waiter named one of the specials, "boeuf de rigueur, which our chef will fix deshabelle with carrots and tomatoes covered with faux pas."

The paradox surrounding Keillor is that most of his heroes are literary figures, yet every Saturday he becomes an entertainer, performing for millions of public radio listeners.

In high school, did Keillor ever see himself standing onstage, singing, hoofing and entertaining? "Never. I thought it would be death."

Keillor is an entertainer, he said, but only as far as performing his own material. "I'm not an actor. I wouldn't know how to play another part."

Keillor, who broke away from his Minnesota roots after he felt a newspaper devoted too much attention to his place of residence, has returned to the Twin Cities area. He now lives in the woods of western Wisconsin, within driving distance of Minneapolis - St. Paul.

Keillor describes the property as a small farm. But "by Nebraska standards, it's not a farm. It's just a yard," he said. "It's 80 acres, and if you've been living in an apartment, that seems like half the prairie. I rent out most of the land to a farmer who has soybeans and alfalfa."

He still has great affection for New York City, where he retains an apartment. The "American Radio Company" presents eight programs each season from New York.

---

**Omaha World-Herald (NE)**

**Date:** April 30, 1993

**Page:** 35sf

Copyright (c) 1993 Omaha World Herald