

Homey Humorist Visits SF



KEILLOR: Best known for his "Prairie Home Companion" show on National Public Radio and his Lake Wobegon books

■ *National Public Radio's Garrison Keillor will share news from Lake Wobegon and gospel music with the City Different*

BY JEANNIE JOHNSON
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Garrison Keillor's warm melodious voice wraps around you like the hodgepodge afghan your grandmother crocheted out of leftover yarn.

His folksy stories plop you right into the mythical Minnesota town of Lake Wobegon, where "all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above average."

Keillor, best known for his "Prairie Home Companion" show on National Public Radio and his Lake Wobegon books,

brings his homey humor and love of gospel music to Santa Fe tonight.

He'll appear with the Hopeful Gospel Quartet at the Paolo Soleri Amphitheatre on the Santa Fe Indian School campus at 7:30 p.m., rain or shine. Reserved tickets are \$45 with general admission tickets going for \$32.

Half the show will be news from Lake Wobegon and half will be gospel music. Keillor's love of gospel music goes back to his childhood when he attended gospel meetings and sat "on the laps of large women in print dresses who all sang alto."

"I love gospel music," he said Tuesday in a telephone interview from his hotel room in Santa Fe. "It's what I grew up with. It's the music that plays early in the morning and late at night on the upper regions of the AM dial. It's the music sung by men in bad suits and terrible toupees, but it's fast, syncopated and sacred. I just

See **HOMEY** on **PAGE 3**

Homey Humorist Visits Santa Fe

from PAGE 1

love it.”

As a member of the Sanctified Brethren church, Keillor grew up in a family that believed in separation from the rest of the world, “including my show.” His parents initially disapproved of his vocation.

“Over a period of years they’ve learned to tolerate it,” he said. “We’re not show business people. We’re not brought up for this life, but for the next.”

The pull of pursuing a dream outweighed the persuasion of fellow Sanctified Brethren, Keillor said.

“I intended to go to the University of Minnesota and major in literature,” he said. “I was going to read great novels and write fiction. This one Sanctified Brethren sat me down and had a long talk with me about why that was exactly the wrong thing to do.

“He went on to tell me why I should go to work at a filling station pumping gas or work at the post office. He said these were selfless jobs. I thought about it and made my choice to take this road. I carefully considered the option between being a tired — but happy — performer and a disgruntled postal worker.”

While he chose a path contrary to the one his parents would have chosen, he still draws on his life experiences in his humor. And he still enjoys a good church potluck.

“I always go for the hamburger hotdish,” he said. “There are some variations on the hotdish, but it’s always some combination of elbow

macaroni, ground meat and some kind of tomato sauce. They may add onions and occasionally green peppers.”

And what about the Jell-O?

“I look for creativity in my Jell-O molds,” he said. “I was once offered a choice of three Jell-O molds. One was in the shape and color of the brain with the ridges and everything. One was a depiction of the Last Supper, and one was in the outline of the state of Minnesota — in green, of course — with raspberries marking the major cities. I chose Minnesota, of course.”

Keillor remains devoted to his home state. It’s where his friends of 40 years live and where he can talk about books, movies, politics and “lie about his children.” He said he doesn’t have to spend time talking about his childhood because they know all his stories.

Even though his stories are drawn from his life in Minnesota, they cross all cultures, he said. He said his act won’t change in Santa Fe, but he did write a song about the City Different.

It’s called “Children Go Get Centered” and is an adaptation of an old spiritual, Keillor said. It’s a counting song that begins with 12-step programs and covers heavenly crystals, organic trail mix and Birkenstock sandals.

“I’m just a guy from Minnesota who talks about what I know,” he said. “... We’ll offer what we know as strangers. The last thing I would do is pretend I was from here.”

For ticket information, call Ticketmaster at (505) 884-0999.