

# Just another day

Garrison Keillor celebrates 25 years of 'A Prairie Home Companion'... with no celebration

By Brian Lambert  
St. Paul Pioneer Press

For his part, Garrison Keillor has informed the press he'll be making no special observance of the 25th anniversary of "A Prairie Home Companion."

No self-congratulatory interviews of the People magazine and "Entertainment Tonight" variety, with Keillor spelling personal pronouns like cartridges from an automatic rifle. No smiling shots of the Keillors at home on their designer-approved settee.

### LOCALLY

The 25th anniversary episode of "A Prairie Home Companion" will be aired at 3 p.m. Saturday, and repeated at 6 p.m. Sunday, on KPFX radio.

He doesn't do that kind of thing. Thank God.

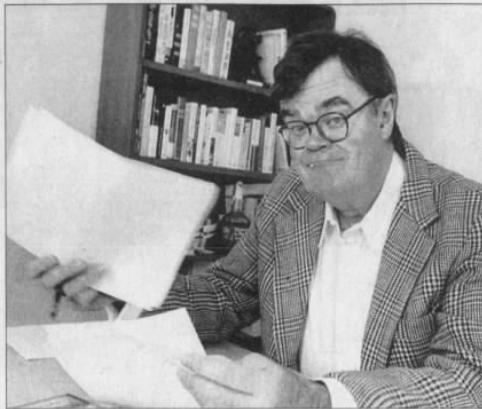
After 25 years, this Saturday evening is just another date, and he'll celebrate it with another show. You can decide for yourself how much of this is another example of Keillor's quirky contrarian personality. The guy who makes left turns where others invariably go right.

But we can agree he's earned it. A quarter century going your own way is a long ways down roads most other people never dare explore.

Likewise, there's not much mystery about his value to the Minnesota Public Radio empire, arguably the most successful entity of its kind in the country. Ditto the entire public radio network, which continues to regard him and "PHC" as one of its two or three most popular programs and influential fund-raising vehicles.

But Keillor's value to what passes for breadth of expression on contemporary American radio itself can't be understated. While a financial success by any estimation, Keillor and "A Prairie Home Companion" hardly compares to the likes of commercial radio cash machines like Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura Schlessinger.

And when you move from there to subjective issues of literate satire, a genuine affinity for American folklore and a resolute determination to



Garrison Keillor, pictured in his office in St. Paul, Minn., has made his mark for what he hasn't done as much as for what he has.

build large audiences without pandering, you appreciate Keillor's presence all the more.

That may be like saying, as you stand back for a moment and look at his 25 years of work with "Prairie Home Companion," that he's as valuable for what he hasn't done as for what he has. The Riverton Trading merchandise machinery notwithstanding, Keillor has, by and large, avoided transforming himself into a caricature via the kind of cultish, celebrity worship other personalities have manufactured for themselves in such aggressive, calculated ways.

It may be that Keillor's core audience is too

smart for that kind of thing. They can get all the rude, "I got mine" know-it-alls they'll ever want at a dozen other stops on the dial. We suspect "PHC" fans remain loyal to Keillor, in part, because, after 25 years, he continues to provide a stark alternative to the crassness and blind bucksterism that blares from so much of commercial radio.

Keillor may be quirky and idiosyncratic, but he's survived all this time with his dignity intact. In the modern marketplace, where people of talent so commonly and willingly sacrifice their dignity for commercial success, that may be the most commendable aspect of his silver anniversary.

## Keillor books well-received by both adults and children

By Mary Ann Grossmann  
St. Paul Pioneer Press

Since his days as editor of the University of Minnesota literary magazine, Garrison Keillor has been both writer and radio show host.

He was a staff writer for The New Yorker magazine, he writes the monologues for "A Prairie Home Companion," and he has eight well-received adult books to his credit, as well as two children's books and one for young adults that he co-wrote with his wife, Jenny Lind Nilson.

Here's a brief look at his books, with dates of hardcover publication: "Happy to Be Here" (1981) This debut book is made up of gently humorous fictional essays that range in subject from a call for sly rights to pieces about radio station WLT, which are precursors to the book Keillor would write 10 years later.

"Lake Wobegon Days" (1985) — The book that catapulted Keillor to literary stardom and the cover of Time magazine still delights readers. Made up of bittersweet stories about Lake Wobegon and its citizens (who Keillor had introduced on his radio show), this book is festooned with footnotes.

"Leaving Home" (1987) — Made up of stories written for performance on "A Prairie Home Companion," this book was published the year Keillor announced the end of his radio show. Included is the touching script for the last show, in which the narrator sits in the Chatterbox Cafe and watches the citizens.

"We Are Still Married" (1989) — When this collection of 72 stories, poems and letters was published, Keillor was living in New York. He is lyrical about his life in Manhattan, honest about his fears and hopes, and frank in coming to terms with middle age and relationships.

Aging was on his mind as he

heads into his late 40s. "I wish I could quit writing humor and write irritation for a while. I grow old and irritable."

"W.T. A Radio Romance" (1991) — Published a year before Keillor returned to the Midwest, his first full-fledged novel is funny and very bawdy. Set in a Minneapolis radio station (a cross between WCCO and MPR), during the 1930s and '40s, the story is populated by lecherous, insulting and duplicitous Minnetons.

"The Book of Guys" (1993) — This is Keillor thinking about the travails of being a "guy" in this modern age. He laments that no matter which way a guy runs these days, there's something or someone waiting to trip him up.

"Wobegon Boy" (1997) — Keillor revisits Lake Wobegon in this novel about John Tollefson, great-grandson of one of Lake Wobegon's Norwegian immigrant founders.

"Me By Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente, as told to Garrison Keillor" (1999) — Keillor says he had the time of his life writing this political satire, inspired by Gov. Jesse Ventura's career.

Keillor's books for children: "Cat, You Better Come Home" (1995) — A cat leaves for Europe, makes a fortune in cat food and comes home in a sorry state. With paintings by Minneapolis artist Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher.

"The Old Man Who Loved Cheese" (1998) — An old guy who loves the stinky stuff is hauled into court by the cheese police.

"The Sandy Bottom Orchestra" (1996) — Keillor and his wife wrote this story about a girl who plays the violin and her friend who prefers to play sports.

## Garrison Keillor says thanks, but no thanks to paper's interview

St. Paul Pioneer Press

Here's the e-mail from Garrison Keillor in response to our request for an interview, which included some questions via e-mail:

Thanks for your good questions, but it doesn't seem like a good idea to me, the paper doing a spread on the 25th. Celebrating an anniversary strikes me as an invitation to bad luck, so I decided not to do a big party, as we did for the 10th back in 1984. That felt like heroism, hitting 10 years, and this feels like great good luck. And if

*Celebrating an anniversary strikes me as an invitation to bad luck.*

you're lucky, you're not supposed to stage a testimonial for yourself and get a plaque from the mayor and be written up in the paper. You sit

tight and do your homework and hope the market holds.

To quit a show and then have the chance to resume it is a piece of good luck that a person shouldn't count on. And also to leave home and be accepted back.

In the beginning, a writer aches for publication and for people to read your stuff and then, if you have a little success, you may get deluged with work and wonderful offers and it's terrifically exciting and then it's terminally bewildering — I went through this back in '86 — and that

led to the demise of the show in 1987.

So, on the second time around, one is determined to stick to business. The great blessing is to have work that is satisfying, and that's enough.

You shouldn't look back. You shouldn't try to figure out who you are. You just keep going to work. You do your piece. You hoe your row. You try to make yourself useful to the audience.

And that's all we try to do at PHC.

Garrison Keillor

## Haase's Greenhouse

SALE!

Our summer clearance sale is now in progress. If you need a few more flowers to fill in here or there this is the sale for you. All annuals are now at least 30% to 50% off regular prices. Come and visit our greenhouse. You'll be glad you did!

## The Plant Mill

Introducing our annual Red, White and Blue Sale!

Find Dahms with red, white or blue in them (same coloring, etc.) and SAVE 15%!

Come see what fun you can have with this sale.

Open July 4th!