

# Keillor still master storyteller

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Of the News-Herald  
ST. PAUL, Minn. — Garrison Keillor is a master storyteller.

Names. Dates. Details. Intricate details delivered in a seemingly monotone voice that draw you into the conversation — almost as though you knew these people personally, too. Long, descriptive details that formed word pictures in your mind.

You probably remember Garrison from his fictional "Lake Wobegon Days" — a best-selling book about that mythical Minnesota town where "the women are strong, the men are good looking and all the children are above average." Or as the brochure said: Lake Wobegon is "the town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve."

Keillor has penned a handful of books in his down-home style. But it is not the printed words that give him the edge. It is the personal storytelling. And there is something special about being in the audience to hear him talk. It is his style, his delivery, his stage presence that set Keillor apart from those other wannabe storytellers. He is a master of the craft.

Keillor is back home and just as comfortable on the stage of the World Theater, where he is again performing "A Prairie Home Companion" show for listeners on Minnesota Public Radio.

The theater itself is ornate. And the time-honored clock is positioned near center stage.

But no one was paying attention to the clock or the time as Keillor took center stage for a two-hour, storytelling performance. There

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were no cue cards, but he didn't miss a beat. The chatter was endless, but the time passed quickly.

Some of the stories were old — from his oft repeated childhood days. Others were new, fresh out of that day's headlines. From each he found truth and meaning — some joy, some sorrow; some laughter some tears.

He sat under that single spotlight atop a backless stool. His trademarks were there — the red tie and red socks. He was a humorist in command of this audience. At times it was so quiet that you would have been able to hear a pin drop.

Story after story was embellished and delivered as if he and each audience member were having a personal conversation. But no one talked back.

It is the type of show that he performed continuously from 1974-87, a stint that was interrupted as he tried to find himself and a meaning to life and as he wrote a new novel, "The Book of Guys," which will be published this month.

His radio variety show, which changed the way Midwesterners looked at themselves — and the way the world looked at Midwesterners, for that matter — was a time warp institution every Saturday night.

The night we sat and listened there were no special guests, or special music — unless you consider his poem rendition of "Casey at the Bat" out of the ordinary. It was only Keillor and his pianist on

stage. Three songs and a lot of stories. And his barbs were gentle, even though he has little love for newspaper editors and reporters who invaded his privacy a few years ago and caused him to pack his bags and leave town.

Keillor is a writer, a listener, an observer of life. In a way, he seems shy and unassuming. He uses small talk to draw listeners in. He uses song and jokes. But there is never any question that he is in control of the dialog and of his audience.

The World Theater is again his home and his faithful listeners seem ready to tune in to hear what's been happening these days in Lake Wobegon — and other parts of the world.

His words are carried on 275 public radio stations and heard by an estimated 1.8 million people once again each Saturday night.

Last week, he told us stories about witnessing a fatal car-bus crash. He talked about multiple choice tests and his failing grades because "C" was no longer the acceptable — or correct — answer on those college tests. He talked about his school days and a classmate he admired and how he got a lead role in a play. He reminded his audience that he learned how to take control of the situation when he directed cars into specific parking spaces in a University of Minnesota lot. And he admitted he was a newspaper reporter dropout because he couldn't ask the tough questions that his St. Paul employer demanded. He talked about tragedies. And he talked about life in general.



**GARRISON KEILLOR**

It was all good fun. And it proved that Lake Wobegon is alive again. And that Keillor is still the master storyteller.