

Humorist Garrison Keillor talks about guy stuff

By Rob Haasen
Bellevue Sun

Garrison Keillor called back from a Kentucky hotel, Eastern Standard Time. "I think," Keillor wasn't perfectly sure of his whereabouts but was perfectly prepared to address the state of guyhood.

"Guys are keeping a precarious balance. They are doing the best they can and staying within the lines that have been drawn for them," Keillor says. "We have allowed ourselves to be disciplined. Men are meant to be bold and foolish."

Men are meant to hit the road, Keillor is touring with "Stories of Guys," in which he sings, tells tales and reads selected chunks from "The Book of Guys" (Viking, \$22). The story line of his book and 17-city November tour is that males — "one of the world's great genders" — are in trouble.

just like his old radio show. To complete the circle, Keillor this year ditched the name and again calls his show "A Prairie Home Companion."

"Garrison is a master of interpreting people," says Bill Kling, president of Minnesota Public Radio, which produces "A Prairie Home Companion." Kling is a longtime friend and boss of Keillor's.

"He understands people's faults and foibles, and he can play that back to the average person in a way that they recognize and find very funny," Kling says.

Listening to Garrison Keillor on the phone is no match for listening to him on FM radio. For one thing, the telephone has feeble fidelity. Its itty-bitty microphone chops Keillor's deep resonance off at the knees. Still, his telephone voice sounds like the best of three male voices harmoniously wrapped into one.

While we had him on the phone, we talked about humor and guy stuff.

Is there a difference between comedy and humor?

"I have never been clear on

this. There are a lot of things I'm not clear on, like grammar.

"I think of comedy as being wit, and wit is a kind of manipulation using language. It's a sort of a show you go to and laugh yourself sick and then can't remember any of it. Whereas, I try to give people something they might remember and take away."

WHY AREN'T there more commercially successful humorists?

"Because they're unnecessary. Most people do it for yourselves.

Go and listen. People are richly funny. Most people feel they can't sing; there are very few Americans who would admit to having no sense of humor.

Are you sick of the word "sensitive"?

"I don't like the word. I don't know what it means."

Women are teeing off on guys these days...

"Women's ridiculing of men has been rich... and deep... and sharp. They are extremely funny on the subject of men."

"I don't think guys can survive the loss of humor — that is

the deepest cut of all. I think that there are joke police out there, trying to make us behave in a certain way, write in a certain way...

"If we allow ourselves to fit some mold then we will no longer be able to hold the attention of our women friends."

This would be a bad thing, right?

Yes, Keillor says.

Garrison Keillor
Guy Stuff



"Men have been inhibited. They need to get together," says Keillor, public radio's marquee player.

Garrison, is this you? Is this the smooth-talking curator of Lake Wobegon or a graduate of the Robert Bly School of Bonding Warrior Woodsmen?

"I do believe in what I'm saying, but the purpose is to make people weak and dizzy with laughter," says Keillor, author of "WLT: A Radio Romance," "We Are Still Married" and "Lake Wobegon."

Women, he believes, are more qualified to run the world than men — or at least they are supremely more qualified to lead an adult life. They should go ahead and take over the world so "guys can pursue their destiny as adventurers, lovers, humorists, and backup singers," writes Keillor.

HE WRITES. He sings. He has a deep voice. The 51-year-old storyteller has these cavernous pauses between sentences as he rolls out the red carpet of a story. And radio is his baby. Keillor's two-hour live radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," airs Saturday evening on more than 265 public radio stations.

An estimated 1.7 million people listen to the show's comedy sketches, guest singers and Keillor's homelord stories. "The News from Lake Wobegon" is his running monologue on the fictional Minnesota town "that time forgot and the decades cannot improve." The book, "Lake Wobegon," was parked on the New York Times best-seller list for 44 weeks.

For 13 years, Keillor broadcast Minnesota-based "A Prairie Home Companion."

But in 1987, he stopped hosting the show. A newspaper had published a picture and address of his St. Paul home, and this becoming performer got steamed and left. He spent a year in Copenhagen with his bride.

Public radio and the public left a light on for him.

A homesick Keillor returned and settled in New York. In 1988, he started a new public radio program called "The American Radio Company" — which was

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