

## Men Are Like Dogs: Garrison Keillor, Philosopher

■ **Theater:** 'Guys have to stop trying to make it up to women,' says the humorist. He's bringing a stage version of his 'Book of Guys' to Royce Hall Sunday.

By LAWRENCE CHRISTON  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

If Eskimos have more than 100 words for *snow*, men have at least as many self-protective angles to guard their impenetrable silence in the face of women. That is a hopelessly large generalization, of course, like most of

the explanations thrown up around the sexual flash points peculiar to the '90s, and humorist Garrison Keillor contends that we should stop worrying about it.

Being "All-rite" in a woman's world "is a dismal way to spend your life," Keillor's writes in his latest volume, "The Book of Guys." "... Guys are not equipped for it anyway. We are

lovers and artists and adventurers, meant to be noble, free-ranging and foolish, like dogs, not competing for a stamp of approval, Friend of Womanhood."

While no woman wants to be called a dog, there are plenty who successfully aspire to art and adventure. And who doesn't want love? "The Book of Guys" therefore has run into mixed reviews. "It becomes clear," writes Patricia Holt in the San Francisco Chronicle, "that Keillor is building a case against women as manipulating, tyrannical forces

trying to change men's nature. . . . Can he be serious?"

Keillor, now 51, isn't worried about reviews ("I think women understand better than men that this is a funny book," he says), and has been traveling with a companion theater piece—along with Kate MacKenzie and Richard Dworsky—also called "The Book of Guys," which brings him to Royce Hall Sunday evening. The performance includes both readings from the book and sketches that elaborate on its theme.

"One need not make too much of a funny book," he said on the telephone from St. Paul, Minn. "Why does Dave Barry get by just being funny? Nobody reads meanings and portents of the American family in him. I'm bemused by it. Once in a while you see a story of yours in a college monthly; you turn to the part for class discussion and the question, 'What was the author's intent?'

The stories just came along one by one. After a while I decided to work in this vein, writing mono-

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LOS ANGELES TIMES

## KEILLOR: 'We Are a Cheerful People'

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logues within a character, delivered from his point of view."

Keillor's voice didn't sound querulous in the least, and in fact his personal feelings about women are quite the opposite of a lot of his characters' lonesome speculations.

"Guys have to stop trying to make it up to women," Keillor said. "They can't. Some women have reached a point where normal communication isn't available. But men get nowhere by pleading guilty to the violence of gender."

"There was a line in my novel 'WLT' where an old rakish guy is looking back and says, 'I have wasted a lot of my life in the company of treacherous and boring men, but I've never regretted a moment with a beautiful woman, and never met one I didn't consider beautiful.' I'm an old-fashioned Midwestern male. If the women who're my pals started getting

edgy around me, I'd be heartbroken."

Even on the telephone, Keillor's voice rolled in the familiar gentle cadence that has furlled around American evenings like an evocative summer breeze ever since "A Prairie Home Companion" went national on American Public Radio in 1980. While our media empires look at the heartland from some remove within their bi-coastal headquarters or their impatient flyovers, Keillor represents one of those prairie schooner sensibilities endlessly poking into new hollows and landscapes of the American experience.

Asked about some of his general observations and more recent readings of the national temper, Keillor said, "The regular news-magazine cover story we've become accustomed to, the crisis of the week, whether the family or

Broadway, tells us we're on the verge of collapse.

"But we are a cheerful people, and optimistic. There's plenty to be troubled by, but my sense is that people feel it's awfully good to be alive. This is a time of great possibility. Bill Clinton represents a huge change in American politics. Change is always accompanied by misdirection and floundering, but underneath there are profound things going on in the country, and I think they're for the good."

In viewing America as a land too easily gripped in self-righteous-

ness, Keillor views its great humorists as corrective agents. "We've been well-served by Mark Twain, who challenged the righteousness of the North after the Civil War, and Will Rogers, who was a man of the people who went after men of power but stayed free of rancor."

Keillor no doubt shares his fictive Lutherans' disdain for the superlative—where the best of times is never better than "not too bad"—but there are a lot of people who feel that he's about as close as we've managed to get.

### For the Record

**TV movie**—"Bonanza: The Return" airs Sunday at 9 p.m. on NBC. The time was not clear in Best of the Weekend in Friday's Calendar.

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