



Daily News Photo by Jacek Gancarz

Garrison Keillor sits backstage at The Society of the Four Arts Tuesday before his speech. He is the radio personality behind 'Prairie Home Companion.'

## 'Dangerous' times here, warns Keillor

Humorist also tells trademark stories about Lake Wobegon during Four Arts visit.

By **JAN SJOSTROM**  
Daily News Arts Editor

Minnesota humorist Garrison Keillor's visit to Palm Beach was all business, he told the audience Tuesday at The Society of the Four Arts.

"I'm here in Florida on a fact-finding trip," he said. "Minnesota has exported a number of people here. From time to time I need to come down and see if I can lure any of them back.

"We have doubts about this. Florida is a sensual place with a type of vegetation not visible in Minnesota and a style of life Lutherans do not permit themselves — at least when they think they're around people who might know them."

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## KEILLOR 'We are a nation of comedians'

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Keillor's tales of life in the fictional Minnesota town of Lake Wobegon have delighted listeners since his show *A Prairie Home Companion* first aired in 1974. Today, more than 2.6 million listeners tune in weekly to the show on more than 450 public radio stations. Keillor has written 11 books and won a Grammy Award for his recording *Lake Wobegon Days*.

The lanky jeans-wearing storyteller spoke without notes in his husky sing-song. His talk meandered over characteristic ground — reminiscences of small-town Minnesota life in the 1950s, poetry recitations and a tunefully sung commercial jingle.

He comes from dark, stoical stock, he said. Minnesotans gravitate to Florida, but their self-denying streak ensures that they make the trip by car and visit relatives they don't really like, he said.

Between the dryly funny

and often touching stories, Keillor inserted some thoughts on more sober topics.

"We are living in a dangerous moment in history," he said. "You and I are old enough to recognize great national danger. It may be possible for 18- or 19-year-old people to become fascinated by the way technology brings the war into our living rooms in a way that was not possible in Vietnam. It may make the war seem like some kind of video game — but not to you and me."

He is one of the 15 percent to 20 percent of Americans who oppose the war in Iraq, but there's no point in discussing that because the decision to invade has been made, he said. What worries him is what will happen in the next five to 10 years, he said.

"We can't make the world conform to our wishes," he said. "God forbid that as a Christian army going into a Muslim country we should be taken as engaging in a religious war."

"We have no history of that in our country. This could be one of the darkest periods in our history, to be

engaged in a religious war in a part of the world most Americans have had little experience in. It's a war we could never win. Worse than that, it's a war we would find very difficult to get out of."

Keillor said he hopes he's wrong about the possible course of the war. Americans aren't suited for tragedy, he said. "We are a nation of comedians," he said.

The pursuit of happiness is ingrained into the national fabric, he said. "Everybody has some way they can make themselves happy. This is part of the way you and I grew up."

Segueing into a meditation on happiness, Keillor described some of the things that make him happy — a well-grilled burger, a baseball game tied in the bottom of the ninth inning, the finale of a great Broadway musical.

"Happiness is specific, we believe in America," he said. "Darkness and gloom is general. If you think about things in general, you almost always bring yourself down."

Keillor was the final speaker of the season in the Four Arts lecture series.

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