

Lake Wobegon creator visits Wilkes-Barre

By Alexander Choman
Citizens' Voice Arts Critic

Best selling author, comedian, performance artist and one of public radio's most popular voices, Garrison Keillor, visited the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts Tuesday night before an audience of 1,700 people.

Keillor told stories, joked, and spoke about some of the characters and places on his enormously popular radio show, A Prairie Home Companion. It is the place known for its famous guests, fictitious characters and, of course, lovely Lake Wobegon.

Born in 1942 in Minnesota, the 61-year-old radio personality and author captured the Kirby audience from the onset with his array of humorous stories, quick one-liners and patented golden-throated voice.

Keillor, as they say, has a voice just made for radio.

Keillor stood center stage most of the evening grasping the wired microphone stand as he seemed to stare mostly stage right and often down until he recalled his story (or made it up).

Then he'd turn right or left or look straight out over the audience with outstretched hands to make a point. Keillor wore a two-piece suit with bright red socks and fashionable sneakers.

He spoke of his home state Minnesota all night.

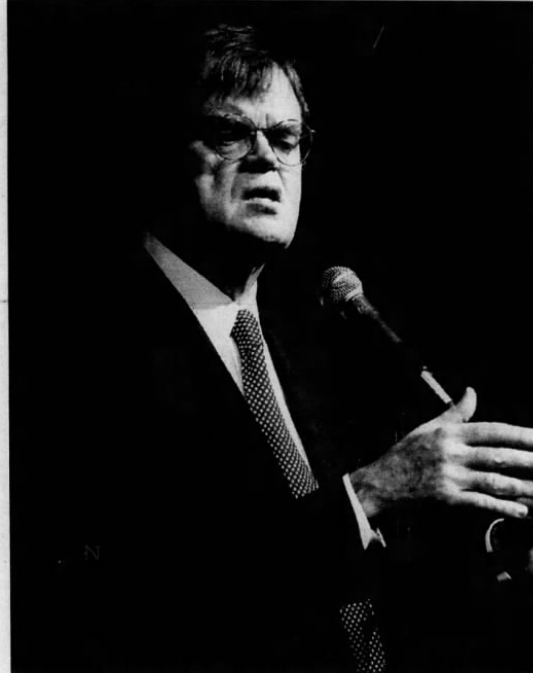
"We feed our babies garlic up there so we can find them in the dark mostly," Keillor quipped.

He would then start a bit, which somehow found him reciting all 87 counties in the state of Minnesota.

"We uncovered a 1937 Chevrolet once that people were using for a septic tank. Man, somebody just didn't like that car!" Keillor says.

Keillor paints pictures with words. He can make you feel like you are at imaginary Lake Wobegon at a summer camp fest or up north at Camp Scotty.

"Camp Scotty is named after one of our famous explorers," Keillor related. "He was a great



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Garrison Keillor appeared at Kirby Center Tuesday night.

aviator and was the first person to fly the length of the Mississippi River non-stop ... in 1956."

The Kirby audience roars with laughter at the story and at Keillor's trademark delivery.

His shtick is his underplay, his ability to speak very slowly and deeply to make his point. He has you reeled in, intently devoted to his every word and then when you least expect it — BAM! He delivers the punchline to the joke or story.

Keillor finished the evening's performance in song.

He told the Kirby audience that the melody of "Tell Me Why" fits a dozen or so different songs, and before anyone knew it, he was directing a chorus of 1,700 in four or five of those songs.

Garrison Keillor is articulate,

extremely quick of wit and has an imagination that he credits to reading, reading, reading.

Before he left the Kirby Center Tuesday night, he asked in a brief interview afterward if I thought that he pronounced the name of Wilkes-Barre correctly. I assured him that many other artists who visit the theater wrestle with the same question.

"I do hope I got it right," he said. "It's important you know."

I certainly knew what he meant, and I'm sure the nearly sold-out audience that left the Kirby Center fulfilled and entertained felt the same way.

You see, as it turns out, it's important for Keillor to get it right.

He figures his audience deserves only the best.

In that case, I sure hope this is the way you spell Wobegon.

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