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Garrison Keillor returns to Elliott Hall

By Tim Brouk

tbrouk@journalandcourier.com

For more than 30 years, Garrison Keillor has made his home state of Minnesota and many other states entertainment for the world.

The host of Minnesota Public Radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* also takes his show on the road. The two-hour show that is aired on National Public Radio is broadcast live from theaters in front of a live audience. Keillor uses local flavor from each city to help shape the show.

"It's a writing assignment," said Keillor, during a recent telephone interview. "You eliminate the irrelevant and keep working at it. Somehow you will come up with some notes on Purdue, West Lafayette and Indiana and use them to twist our show in the right direction. It's a show coming from a different place. It's a live show. There just aren't many anymore. Even news shows, more and more are taped."

Keillor will bring his traveling radio circus of actors, musicians and producers back to Purdue University at 5:45 p.m. Saturday in Elliott Hall of Music. The show will be broadcast live on WBAA FM. It will be replayed from 2 to 4 p.m. Jan. 29 on WBAA AM.

A Prairie Home Companion made its Purdue debut on April 14, 2001.

Keillor's *Companion* is a lot like a variety show with guests,

If you go

What: *A Prairie Home Companion* with Garrison Keillor

When: 5:45 to 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Elliott Hall of Music, Purdue University

How much: \$50 to \$21. call 424-3933

On the Net: <http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/>; listen to *A Prairie Home Companion* online at www.wbaa.org

live music, skits, comedic fake commercials and greetings from the audience.

"They're messages we read on the air to folks in the armed forces or relatives around the country — happy birthdays and happy anniversaries," Keillor said.

As one of the highest-rated shows on NPR, *A Prairie Home Companion* doesn't have to hit the road for 25 of its 35 broadcasts, but Keillor sees it as a way to connect with his audience.

"It's a way to make contact with the audience and have a look at our listeners," Keillor said. "It's a big help to us writing the show month after month. To get some clue and some intuition to who these people are, you need to look at them and stand up in front of them. If we kept it in Minne-

sota, it would be easier in a way, but to get a whole diverse audience, the only way to do that is to travel. This is a country that needs some things to tie it together. It's not like I have any grand ideas for this show, but you feel a kind of patriotism as you get older. You're interested in meeting people other than ones just like you. We did a show in Tupelo, Miss., and I realized there are a lot of people who aren't Midwestern."

When Keillor revisits a city, he works with all new material. He doesn't repeat anything he used last time.

"I try not to look back. I avoid that whenever possible," Keillor said. "We prep ourselves all fresh and new. We take one show at a time. That's something I learned years ago when doing a weekly show. I recommend this as a general operating procedure in life — the one day, one week at a time principle."

Guests on *A Prairie Home Companion* travel with the show while others are pulled from the community. For Purdue's show, the local guests and musicians have not been finalized, but Keillor will be bringing Jearlyn Steele, a singer from Gary who is a regular on *A Prairie Home Companion*, and Jerry Douglas from Nashville, Tenn. Keillor dubbed him as the "best Dobro player in the country."

Keillor said Elliott Hall is a larger venue for *A Prairie Home Companion* to be performed in, but the more people, the better,

as the show is nothing without a live audience.

"People laugh and clap and that's what makes the show. You need an audience to do comedy," Keillor said. "It's very exciting, and you never get over that excitement."

Dan Skinner, general manager of WBAA, said *A Prairie Home Companion* has been consistently in the top four of most popular programs in the last five years along with *Car Talk*, *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*. Skinner was in the audience during *A Prairie Home Companion's* 2001 Purdue broadcast.

"You see how they put the show together," Skinner said. "It's like in old radio before television. You have a sound effects man and actors doing different voices. It's almost like revisiting the 1930s and '40s."

Skinner's favorite part of the show is "obviously Garrison Keillor. His storytelling from Lake Wobegon, all of us can identify with a group of people in his stories, no matter what size of city we live in."

The 2001 broadcast sold out in two weeks. Tickets for the Jan. 28 show have been on sale since Dec. 15, but only about 3,500 out of 6,000 have sold so far.

"I've been very surprised that it's been slow," Skinner said. "The first time was the very first time *A Prairie Home Companion* had come here. As far as our radio audience is concerned, Keillor is still very popular."



By Brian Velasquez

Garrison Keillor, host of Minnesota Public Radio's *A Prairie Home Companion*, will bring the show to Purdue's Elliott Hall of Music at 5:45 p.m. Saturday. The show will be broadcast live on WBAA FM. It will be replayed from 2 to 4 p.m. Jan. 29 on WBAA AM.