

## Keillor spins stories at Shryock Auditorium



THOMAS BARKER / THE SOUTHERN

Writer and humorist Garrison Keillor sings a sonnet while performing a variety show Monday night at SIUC's Shryock Auditorium as part of the Southern Lights Entertainment series.

BY LINDA RUSH  
THE SOUTHERN

CARBONDALE — A plain wooden stool was Garrison Keillor's only prop at his show Monday night. Stark, unadorned, probably also uncomfortable, it could have come from Minnesota.

But it was all Keillor needed — and he probably could have done without it as he sang a cappella, reminisced about his Minnesota childhood and spun stories for more than two hours.

The audience that packed Shryock Auditorium on the Southern Illinois University campus seemed mesmerized as Keillor segued from singing sonnets to decrying modern

gadgetry and self-absorption, to drawing the crowd into long, rambling tales with endless asides. But he had them hooked by the sheer power of his language and his voice.

The longtime host of "A Prairie Home Companion" on public radio opened by "singing sonnets," rambling narratives packed with phrases like "sailing the airwaves like Magellan," and "my eyes get misty when I think of Julie Christie." A fragment of verse said "the Trojan war gave me the willies," which Keillor then rhymed with "Achilles."

The writer, singer and radio host credited Minnesota for giving him the gift of storytelling. It's what

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people do when they are poor, cold or bored, he explained. He and his friends, he explained, didn't have "play dates," but rather "played with kids our parents didn't approve of," while playing games they made up and "roaming like coyotes" around the neighborhood.

He worries the gift of tall tales might be lost because "young people are too well cared for. Parenting was not a verb

when I was young," he explained.

There are far too many kids these days, Keillor said, "walking around with little wires coming out of their ears." He called MySpace and Facebook "exercises in narcissism," saying they are replacing real communication with dry recitals of trivia.

"My people endured boredom," he said, "but stories come out of boredom." Language, he said, "is the entertainment of

poor people," as he gave examples of stories, songs and poetry reflecting his upbringing by "dark Lutherans" in a bleak climate.

"Minnesotans," he quipped, "endure conditions God designed to show people who don't drink what a hangover is like."

Keillor said he loves the old hymns, but doesn't get the "7-11 hymns" (singing seven words 11 times) that seem to be the trend in some mega-churches where worshippers "read

the lyrics off PowerPoint while waving their arms in the air."

As he closed, he urged the audience, "Remember to be kind, to use our manners, to do our part and to be grateful.

"As they say in Lake Wobegon, it could be worse."

Another song bid farewell to the audience: "Goodnight and joy be to you all."

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