

Garrison Keillor comes to Ithaca for solo show

By Jim Catalano
Correspondent

The founder and host of "A Prairie Home Companion," Garrison Keillor has been one of America's best-known radio personalities since the 1970s. But his talents have long extended to other literary formats — everything from music, poetry and prose to books, magazine articles, newspaper columns and more.

This Monday night, Keillor will return to the State Theatre in Ithaca. Although he has broadcast "A Prairie Home Companion" from Ithaca in the past — he was at Cornell's Bailey Hall in the 1990s — this time around he'll be doing a solo show at the State.

"It's just me, myself and I," Keillor said in a phone interview from his native Minnesota earlier this week. "I walk out on stage with some poems, a song or two and tell stories for as long as people are willing to sit and listen. It's always an experiment."

Some of the poems will be from new book, "What a Luxury: Verses Lyrical, Vulgar, Pathetic & Profound," his first collection of light verse.

"Light verse has to be well constructed," Keillor said. "There's no freedom to it at all, the way there is with 'heavy' poetry. But it's fun to write in meter and rhyme. It's like a puzzle — it really is entertaining."

He noted, however, that light verse — verse that's written to amuse people — is a "dying art."

"In my high school English courses, we read some light verse from Ogden Nash and Robert W. Service," he said. "And now, I don't think there's as much of it, though people like Billy Collins write what I think should be called light verse. He's an entertainer. I think even writers like Mary Oliver write some light verse — she has a new book out of poems about a dog, for heaven's sake. But any-



Garrison Keillor will perform solo Monday at the State Theatre in Ithaca. PROVIDED

way, it's not my problem. I love light verse and whatever one considers it to be, so it's infused me, but whatever younger people want to do is up to them."

Keillor's website, www.garrisonkeillor.com, showcases his eclectic approach to writing, with dozens of examples that demon-

strate the range of his work.

"I always thought a writer should try all sorts of things, the same way that if you loved to travel, you would go to different places; if you loved to eat, you'd be open to trying new things," he said. "I'm sort of alarmed at people who only write poetry, as if it were a religious vocation. I just don't understand that — I'd like to, but I don't. I just think the world of letters at large is so fascinating that a person should treat oneself to different experiences."

His next literary goal is to write a nonfiction book. "I'm too old to take on the life of Lyndon B Johnson, but somewhere there's a nonfiction book in me," he said. "I think I'd like to write about autism, which I think is fascinating. I don't quite

IF YOU GO

- » **Who:** Garrison Keillor
- » **What:** Solo show
- » **When:** 7:30 p.m. Monday
- » **Where:** State Theatre
- » **Tickets:** \$42.50-\$69.50; stateofithaca.com
- » **Info:** www.GarrisonKeillor.com

have a handle on it yet, but it's a subject that does not really lend itself to fiction, and I think there are real stories of parents who must deal with this are so gripping themselves, I feel like I ought to."

In 2006, Keillor opened a bookstore, Common Good Books, in St. Paul. "It was bleeding money for about four years — my own fault, really," he said. "But then I moved it to new location, and got a new manager and

everything is fine. It's keeping its head above water. And that really is good enough."

A few years ago, Keillor announced his intention to retire from "A Prairie Home Companion," but that's something about which he's obviously changed his mind. At this point, what does he find most rewarding about doing the show?

"I like to sing duets with female singers whenever I have the chance to," he said. "I got to sing with Heather Massey last week, and I went out on the road with Sara Watkins and Aoife O'Donovan this summer. That's one thing I really get intense pleasure from on stage. It's nothing that the audience is necessarily that wild about — it's a personal pleasure."

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