



"A Prairie Home Companion" host Garrison Keillor, left, and performer Jerrod Niemann at the Grand Ole Opry, where Keillor was a guest announcer in 2010.

Keillor delves into life's quirks with new poetry book

By Duane W. Gang
The Tennessean

Garrison Keillor knows a thing or two about telling stories.

He's told them on the radio, of course. And he's told them onstage and through music. Oh, and he's written a few books, too.

Now, the author, humorist and radio host of "A Prairie Home Companion" is telling stories through a collection of poems.

Although he has edited several anthologies of his favorite poems, his latest book marks a first for him: "O What a Luxury: Verses Lyrical, Vulgar, Pathetic & Profound" touches on love, romance, politics, religion and other aspects of daily life.

In a way, the collection brings the 71-year-old Keillor back full circle. He began writing poems when he was 14.

Why? To impress girls.

Keillor will be at the Nashville Public Library today talking about his latest book as part of the Salon615 author series. Keillor last week answered questions by email about his poetry and Nashville, which he says has always been an "It" city for him. Here are excerpts.

Q: This is your first book of poetry. What made you decide to write a collection of poems?

I'm 71. Life speeds up. You drop stuff you don't really enjoy, like television and going out to noisy restaurants and serving on committees, and devote yourself to what you enjoy most, and one of those is writing poetry. At 71 your reputation is what it is and it will not be enhanced one iota by publishing a book of verse, so there is a wonderful pointlessness about it that is very appealing. The book will earn me about 35 cents per hour for the time I spend on it, which is what I used to earn picking corn and radishes when I was 14, but writing the book was way more fun than picking corn and radishes and so there is progress there. And I like taking a stand in favor of poems about things and Kansas and urination and fatherhood, rather than poems about desperation and loneliness.

Q: You touch on a host of topics in the poems, religion and politics among them. You reference history, Hollywood, famous movie stars and authors. What were your inspirations?

I have nothing about Hollywood movie stars, but I am fond of going to church and preaching for this troublesome world, and I enjoy reading about politics and engaging in the battle from time to time. The battle is against cynicism and narcissism. Church and politics challenge us to be our better selves and that is always a useful thing.

Q: Some of your poems deal with love and romance. Others are about things and urology. What's up with that?

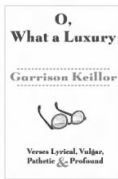
I am anti-thong and pro-urology. As for love and romance, I have fond memories of times when my heart pounded when a particular woman walked through the door. This is the grandest reason to write a poem: to impress a woman with your passion for her. It's why I started writing poems back when I was 14. I couldn't go out for football because I had a heart-valve defect, and I wasn't a brilliant student, so poetry was my trump card. If you write a poem for Christine or Margaret

GARRISON KEILLOR TALKS POETRY

Salon615 is a partnership between the Nashville Public Library, the Nashville Public Library Foundation, Humanities Tennessee and Permaun Books. The author talks are free, ticketed events. Reserved tickets are available for a \$2.50 service fee per ticket through salon615.org. A limited number of auditorium tickets will be available 30 minutes before Salon time on the day of the event. Ticket distribution begins at 5:45 p.m.

Who: Garrison Keillor, author of "O What a Luxury: Verses Lyrical, Vulgar, Pathetic & Profound"

When: Today, 6:15 p.m.
Where: Nashville Public Library, 615 Church St.
Details: salon615.org



"O, What a Luxury," by Garrison Keillor is published by Grove Press. grovepress.com

or Corinne, she will notice this, and she will remember it for the rest of her life.

Q: I'm here in Tennessee. So I've got to ask: Who is the Republican Lady of Knoxville?

She is the one who bought her brassieres by the handful to keep the fronts of her frocks full.

Q: Can we expect any of these poems to become songs? This is Music City, after all!

I've sung "Epicopallan," which is a Fats Waller tune, and "Dark Sikes," which is a takeoff on Irving Berlin, and "Nobody Loves You When You Take a Smoke" is just an old blues and "The Fundamentalist Rag" is very jazzy. Even limericks can be sung. It's a musical book. The pick hit to click would be the song about sperm. I think that could be huge for somebody.

Q: This is not your first visit to Nashville. What are your favorite places to visit? Got a favorite music venue or restaurant?

I depend on my Nashville friends to take me places. I go where they want to go. I once walked around with Vince Gill and people were so nice to me as could be. Lower Broadway is amazing, sort of a National Honky-Tonk Park, and while I miss Lindeburg's and Merchant Lunch, the clamor and hubbub is what a great city is all about. If I need quiet, I can always come back to St. Paul.

Q: Lots of people are calling Nashville the next "It" city. Doesn't that mean the city should get center stage in your next "A Prairie Home Companion" or your next series of poems?

I started "A Prairie Home Companion" after spending an intense couple of weeks in Nashville back in 1974. It wasn't the "It" city then except for me.

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