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TOP STORY

# Garrison Keillor will be thanking his lucky stars on Monday

John Moore The Denver Gazette  
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I intend to walk out on that stage at Red Rocks and give the  
Courtesy garrisonkeillor.com



*[Editor's note: \*This event was scheduled to be held at Red Rocks, but has been moved to the Buell Theatre because of the weather.]*

Garrison Keillor believes he was “an unreasonably lucky man” for 40 years, so it would seem ungrateful for him now to be too terribly upset that about five years ago, as he puts it, “a tornado came and blew the roof off my house.”

He speaks metaphorically. The tornado, in this case, was an allegation of sexual impropriety involving a writer for his legendary radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion." The house was Keillor's considerable legacy as perhaps America's most beloved home-spun storyteller since Will Rogers.

“You are talking to a happy man right now,” a genial Keillor said this week from his apartment in New York. He tells the story of his recent visit to the Mayo Clinic, one informed by 79 years of perspective. He was there for a heart checkup 21 years after a surgeon – a Lithuanian immigrant and the first in his family to go to college – fixed an inherited heart defect that killed two of Keillor's uncles in their 50s, and surely would have gotten him, too.

“It makes me happy to think of this gift of 21 years of life that this surgeon, this son of a Pittsburgh steelworker, gave to me,” Keillor said. It was a gift, he added, that his uncles did not have. “They died unfulfilled,” he said.

“It's a lucky thing to be alive – and to be alive seems, to me, to be enough.”





'It was crazy unfair – but that's what happened,' Garrison Ke  
Courtesy garrisonkeillor.com



He's coming back to Red Rocks on Monday [NOTE: Location has been moved to The Buell Theatre] for what he calls "an old-fashioned revival show." It's a revival of his radio program. Of his relationship with his fans. Of his life as he once knew it. And, if he has his way, it will be a revival of his audience's pandemic-weary spirits.

"I have never known a time in my life that was so complicated and screwed up as the time we are living in right now," Keillor said. "The pandemic has been dreadfully hard, and the country is in a mess, and we have a war in Europe, and the glaciers are melting. Our children are inheriting terrible problems, including the demolition of honest media.

"But I intend to walk out on that stage at Red Rocks and give them a show that will make them happy for 2 1/2 hours. That's my job, and I intend to do it." [NOTE: Location has been moved to The Buell Theatre.]

That show is called "A Prairie Home Companion American Revival." Keillor will be joined by country music star Brad Paisley, bluesman Elvin Bishop's Big Fun Trio, soprano Ellie Dehn and vocalist Heather Masse, among others. For Keillor, who has appeared at Red Rocks three times since 2008, it is a daunting challenge to produce a show that will equal in majesty the setting itself. He'll try with music, humor, audience singalongs and his signature feature, "News from Lake Wobegon: The little town that time forgot and the decades could not improve."

He's looking forward to having what promises to be a politically mixed assortment of audience members unite in the *a capella* singing of "The Star Spangled Banner" – in the key of C.

"My progressive friends are opposed to the National Anthem on principle, but once we get them going, they get into it," Keillor said. "That song pulls you in just before the rockets' red glare."



Keillor considers himself “an old Democrat” but not particularly political. “I’m just an observer,” he said. “I am sad about Trump, but I don’t mind that our audience turns out now to include quite a few Trumpers. I’m glad that they come to the show and that we can all sing ‘My Country ’Tis of Thee; or ‘Goin’ to the Chapel’ together.”

Keillor rose to fame by creating and hosting “A Prairie Home Companion,” a wildly popular weekly radio variety show that aired live from 1974 until Keillor’s retirement in 2016. At its peak in 2015, the show was heard by 4 million listeners on 690 public radio stations. Keillor had long left the airwaves and begun a quieter life as a writer when the tornado hit the house.

Keillor doesn’t mind talking about his moment under the #MeToo microscope. In his steadfast yet folksy way, Keillor makes no apologies for what he describes as “a straight-out shakedown” initiated by a disgruntled male writer on the show who lost his job under the show’s new creative team a full year after Keillor’s retirement.

“He tried to get money out of NPR by bringing a complaint accusing me of sexual harassment of a woman who had worked for me for 13 years,” said Keillor, who admits to what he calls “mutual flirtatious email exchanges” with the woman, but nothing further. “But by then, this man had gotten her to sign on to this complaint, which asked for a settlement of \$1 million – or they would make it public,” he said.

Keillor believes NPR decided to cancel “A Prairie Home Companion” and “The Writer’s Almanac” “because they could not allow the show to continue even the accusation of sexual harassment,”



Keillor's weekly column. Viking Penguin canceled his publishing contract. The word was out, and Keillor was horrified to see his face on the cover of The New York Times alongside Harvey Weinstein and Matt Lauer.

"I mean, it was crazy unfair – but that's what happened," Keillor said. "This complaint came from an angry and unhappy man who failed in his attempt. But there is no response you can make. I didn't try to extort sexual favors from anybody. It was all a piece of fiction. The whole thing wound up a mess. It was a disaster. But there was simply nothing to be done about it."

Though his case did not result in criminal charges or any announced settlement, it has not been an easy comeback for Keillor. When his comeback tour began in 2019, there was pushback on social media, calls for pickets, and some media outlets reportedly declined advertising from promoters.

And yet, Keillor said: "I'm sitting at home writing, and I'm perfectly happy."

If all that he says is completely true, Keillor is asked: Why are not more angry? "Because I married well on my third attempt," he said of his wife of 27 years.

"The pandemic was horrible for so many people, but for me it was a chance to just stay home and be with my wife. We began living this simple life in our apartment. I get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and I sit and I write. We go for a walk in Central Park and we come home and we play Scrabble. The best part is that we don't plan anything. Because there's no planning when you are 79 years old. You live every day, and every day feels kind of fabulous."

He's asked if he has any last words.

"At my age, sir, we don't use the words 'last words' We avoid that

"I still have a lot more to say."



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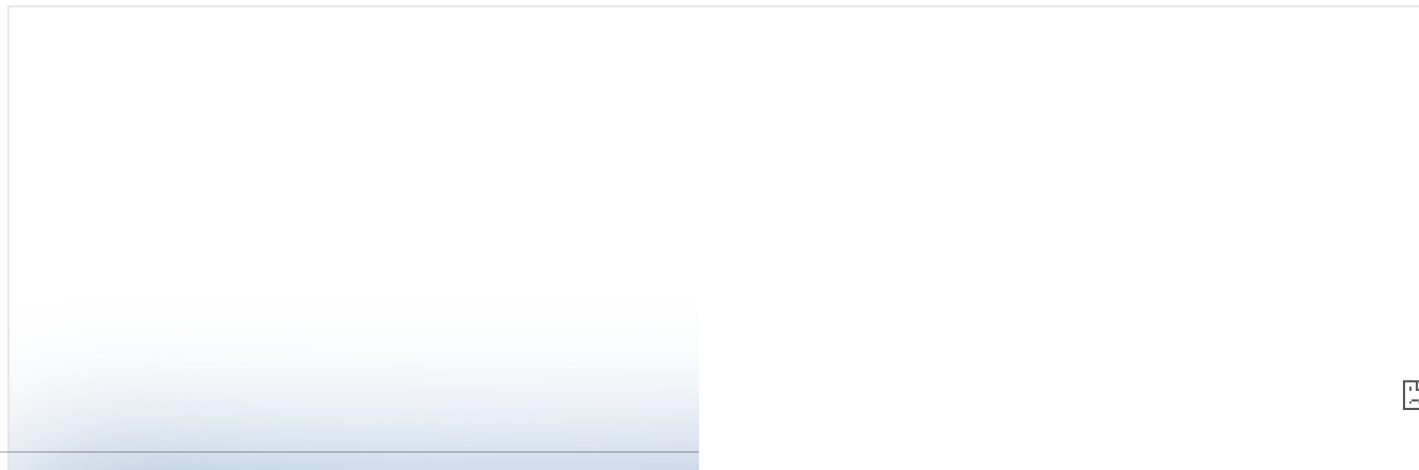
## If You Go

### 'A Prairie Home Companion American Revival with Garrison Keillor'

- Date: Monday, May 2
- Time: 7:30 p.m.
- With: Brad Paisley, Elvin Bishop's Big Fun Trio, Ellie Dehn, Heather Masse, Sue Scott, Tim Russell, Fred Newman, Rich Dworsky and the Guy's All-Star Shoe Band
- Where: Buell Theatre\*
- Ages: All Ages
- Price: \$59-\$89.50
- Tickets: [axs.com](https://www.axs.com)

\*This show was scheduled to be held at Red Rocks but has been moved to the Buell Theatre because of the weather.

## MORE INFORMATION





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