

E4

The Salt Lake Tribune ENTERTAINMENT

## Garrison Keillor's gospel of fun

Continued from E-1

Mr. Keillor observed, "all the women are astounding, all the men are in a hurry, and all the children are on their way to something."

In 1989, Garrison Keillor was back on the air with "American Radio Company," broadcast every Saturday evening (5 p.m. on KUER, 90.1 FM). And he's been there ever since. His audience had remained loyal — an estimated 1.5 million listeners tune in each week, many of them presumably fixing and eating Saturday supper to his two-hour variety show.

"I don't know any feeling better than when the show is about to start," Mr. Keillor says. "I really love it. In fact, I enjoy it more and more. I don't know why that should be true. I feel extremely lucky, and I keep expecting that I will get burned out and lose heart and have to slog through it. But that never happens."

One difference between the early days of "Prairie Home" and the new "ARC" is the level of pre-performance anxiety.

"One of the benefits of experience is that you lose a certain

amount of useless panic, the pointless hysteria when you're young and take yourself much too seriously. When you get older, you grow out of it.

"It's only a show. A show depends so much on the material you have written. If the material is good, then wonderful. If the material is not as good, well, then have as much fun with it as you can. It's like standing at the top of a ski slope, and you are about to push off. The hill is what it is. You can't remake it, and of course you can't turn around."

Mr. Keillor divides his time between New York, his farm in Wisconsin and the road. Most "American Radio Company" shows originate from the World Theater in St. Paul, some from New York, and still others from different locations around the country as the show goes on tour. Tomorrow's show, for instance, will be broadcast from Lincoln, Neb.

"I still have an apartment in New York, an apartment and bed and desk, and about 40 pairs of red socks," Mr. Keillor says. "But I also have a farm in Wisconsin that my son and I have been building and bringing along. So I don't

know where I live.

"When I'm there, I find New York a quiet and wonderful place to work. I find living in the woods to be tumultuous and full of distractions. There is something always breaking down, and something going wrong. I work better in New York, and I have a better life in Wisconsin."

While Mr. Keillor is back in the U.S.A., and back on the radio, one thing he no longer does is write for the *New Yorker*. The reason: Tina Brown, the magazine's new editor, who last helmed *Vanity Fair*. She even pops up in his monologues. A recent sample: "With the old *New Yorker*, you felt guilty if you didn't have time to read everything. Now you don't."

"She's a disastrous editor," says Mr. Keillor unequivocally. "I pulled out when she became editor. But oh well, things change. Nothing is permanent. However, I do think that somebody has to stand up against billionaire owners [S.I. Newhouse] and trashy editors. And she's one of them."

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# Garrison Keillor

The fun of work, the work of fun

By Terry Orme  
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Garrison Keillor isn't sure how or when the Hopeful Gospel Quartet was born.

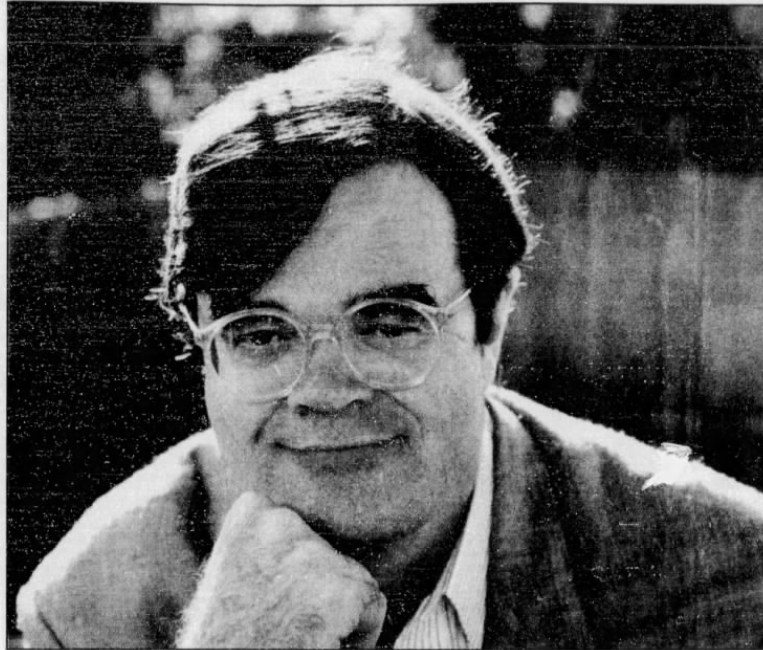
One story has it that Mr. Keillor and fellow songsters Robin and Linda Williams and Kate McKenzie started harmonizing simply to pass the time. It was in the early '80s backstage at the World Theater in St. Paul, Minn., between skits of Mr. Keillor's groundbreaking radio program "A Prairie Home Companion."

"We have known each other for a long time," says Mr. Keillor, filling through his memory to come up with the details of the group's genesis. "But the origins were occasional. There was never a big decision to make a quartet."

Yet a quartet exists, and has sung in Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall, the Universal Amphitheatre and, of course, on the radio on "Prairie Home" and its successor, "The American Radio Company." On Sunday, the four-some's show comes to Kingsbury Hall on the University of Utah campus. Along with the gospel repertoire, Mr. Keillor — always the raconteur — can be counted on to spin a tale or two. Pianist Bob Fisher, the leader of the Coffee Club Orchestra and a regular on "The American Radio Company," will be on hand too.

"We love to sing together," Mr. Keillor says of the simple joys of being part of the Hopeful. "We last got together out on my farm in Wisconsin and sat around for the better part of three days and sang. At our age, however, a person needs a plausible excuse for doing the things you want to do. You can't just go off and do them because you want to do them. And so we go on tour and we make recordings to lend a sense of purpose and dignity to what we are only doing for fun."

That philosophy seems to have



Garrison Keillor, raconteur and songster, says he still loves the radio after being on the air for almost two decades. He's coming to Salt Lake City to sing with the Hopeful Gospel Quartet.

guided Mr. Keillor for the past two decades, through 13 years of "Prairie Home Companion" and four years of "American Radio Company." Mr. Keillor, writing for the *New Yorker* magazine, was preparing a story on Nashville's Grand Ole Opry when struck by the notion of creating a live variety show. "A Prairie Home Companion" was born at Minnesota Public Radio in 1974.

Listeners coast-to-coast tuned in for virtuoso performances by such musicians as guitarists Chet Atkins and Leo Kottke as well as the latest news from Lake Wobegon, "where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average." (The fictional Lake Wobegon, it has been speculated, is actually Anoka, Minn., the city

where Mr. Keillor grew up. It is 20 miles north of the Twin Cities.)

In 1987, Mr. Keillor bid farewell to "Prairie Home." Feeling that the show had become too big, and that he had become too much a public figure, he moved to Denmark, the homeland of his new bride, Ulla Skaerved. At the final broadcast, he told the audience: "I'm going to miss you a lot more than you're going to miss me. See, there's a lot of funnier people around, and a lot of better singers, and you're going to find another show. But you're my only audience. When I leave you, I'm all alone."

The time off — "for good behavior," Mr. Keillor says now — didn't last long. Feeling like a stranger in a strange land, and missing the radio and his audience

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Garrison Keillor and the Hopeful Gospel Quartet

**When:** Sunday, 7 p.m.

**Where:** Kingsbury Hall, University of Utah

**Tickets:** Reserved seats \$25. Available at Kingsbury Hall box office

too much, Garrison and Ulla returned to the United States after a year. They compromised on New York as their home, a place where,

■ See E-4, Column 1