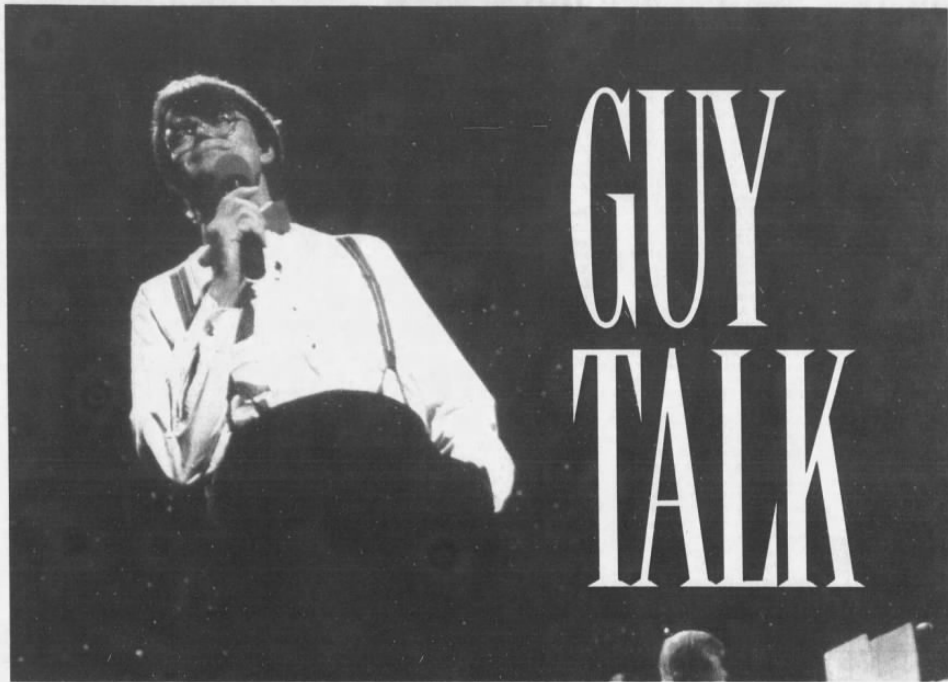


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"Guys are men with a sense of humor," said Garrison Keillor, author of *The Book of Guys*.

Humorist Garrison Keillor tells 'The story of guys'

By ALAN BOSTICK / Staff Writer

Beavis and Butt-head, if they'd ever condescend to read, would be mighty proud. Garrison Keillor — the Dr. Feelgood of Saturday night radio listeners, the nostalgia-sowing, small-town-loving, tummy-rubbing talk show host whose mythical Lake Wobegon warmed the hearts of Middle America — has written a book that lightheartedly makes mush of "political correctness."

Just as the infamous MTV cartoon characters regularly stomp on every toe, the more sensitive the better, so too does Keillor's irreverent new book quash modern notions of male/female relations.

It's called *The Book of Guys* and is a tongue-in-cheek celebration — although he doesn't like that word — of men acting like men... in a decidedly John Wayne sense.

Keillor arrives in Nashville Sunday for a live 7:30 p.m. stage show called "The Story of Guys" that will explore these and other matters with a good helping of music, sketches and even slides.

The host of National Public Radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* (broadcast Saturdays on WPLN-FM) took a break this week from a tour stop in Milwaukee to

explain, in his best Midwestern baritone, exactly what he's up to.

"I've written a book about guys at a time when the gender was commonly thought to be in decline," he said in a tone so dry and matter-of-fact that you have to remind yourself this man's a humorist.

The book — a collection of 21 short stories about "guys" — is basically "a call to women to take over the world so we can get back to our business of being guys not meant to run the world or exercise power. It's thankless work, and we're anxious to have women take over the government so we can be romantics again."

Should these pages be read as a commentary, however wry, on the so-called "men's movement?"

"I know nothing about the men's movement. I've never gone on their retreats."

What's the difference between "guys" and "men?"

"Guys are men with a sense of humor."

Expound.

"When men are deprived of their gift of humor, they're helpless and pitiful. Only when men are able to laugh at all of this are they able to be themselves."

"To be themselves," says Keillor, is to be what men were before the advent of feminism, family counseling and co-dependency. Before men were supposed to be "sensitive" and "thoughtful" and "vulnerable."

Take the *Book of Guys* character Don Giovanni, a cocktail-lounge pianist in Fargo, North Dakota.

Keillor said he enjoyed creating him "because he was politically about as retrograde as one could get."

"He warned against marriage and against making compromises with women. He also argued that a man could have exactly what he wanted without any sort of emotionally problematic arrangements."

Getting there

Humorist and radio personality Garrison Keillor brings his "Story of Guys" stage show to Nashville at 7:30 p.m. Sunday in TPAC's Jackson Hall, 505 Deaderick St. Tickets are \$18.50-\$28.50 and available via Ticketmaster at 741-7777.

There's also the cattle-driver Lonesome Shorty who arrives in town from the "plains" only to find himself longing again for the "plains."

But lest this sort of thinking offend you mightily, reminding you of Neanderthal attitudes you thought long gone, remember that *The Book of Guys* is meant to be funny, a point Keillor emphasizes again and again. It doesn't constitute a book of ethics, a social critique or even observations on modern life. It's simply the latest installment in a line of clever books written when he's not transmitting from behind the public radio mike.

Keillor has trouble explaining the appeal of *A Prairie Home Companion*, which is broadcast nationwide over 265 public radio stations and heard by an estimated 1.8 million people.

He says it would take a "term paper" to clarify the matter. But he does acknowledge that his focus on the traditions of small-town America offers a wealth of evocative material.

"In a small town, people know each other and know each other's histories," he said. "It's possible to create a more dense and multi-layered fiction than if one is writing about the big city, or an individual in a big city."

"That, to me, is not an interesting story." ■