

Monday, November 15, 1993 ■ Features Editor Joe Cutts, 660-1865 or (800) 427-3124



Can't make tonight's show? Garrison Keillor and the Hopeful Gospel Quartet are featured on this Saturday's "Austin City Limits" at 7 p.m. on Vermont ETV. Or tune in "A Prairie Home Companion" at 6 p.m. Saturdays on Vermont Public Radio for the latest from Lake Wobegon.

Just one of the guys?

Garrison Keillor is beating the drum for his new book

By Susan Kelley
Free Press Staff Writer

The simplest question elicits stories from Garrison Keillor, spoken in the same slow, cresting speech and careful wording that ride the radio airwaves Saturday nights.

When Keillor appears at the Flynn Theatre tonight, he'll tell stories about guys — guys in all stages of life, middle-aged guys like Dionysus, for whom orgies, nymphs and wine no longer suffice; young guys like Gary Keillor, who discovers popularity through humor; and guys who just want to be left alone, like George Bush, who fishes with Willy Horton while barbarians wreak havoc in Chicago.

Keillor, best known as the host of American Public Radio's popular "Prairie Home Companion," has recently written about these guys and others in a book titled — what else — "The Book of Guys" (\$22, Viking Penguin publishers).

So who, exactly, are guys?

"Guys are men with a sense of humor," Keillor said in a phone interview from Nashville, Tenn. "There have been scores of books written about men, and they are almost without exception pretentious and without humor. I really think it is a spate of bad literature, so I wanted to sign in with something that might be funny."

One of the best stories, for Vermonters at least, might be "Christmas in Vermont." Although the story mostly pokes fun at Vermont, it also traces that period of guyness when a guy leaves his childish ways behind, and becomes a real guy.

Our hero, Jim, hates Vermont — "too many values, too much woodsmoke, too

much cinnamon." The local McDonald's that looks like a Shaker meeting house has a ski-up window. Jim's dog, Tony, has an eye infection, which Dr. Will, the holist, treats with acupuncture and alfalfa balm.

"Fresh-ground coffee and baguettes and sunsets and colonial structures — Dad, I miss rock'n'roll," Jim cries. "I miss grease."

Jim eventually leaves his dog to talk with Dr. Will and other influential

See **GUYS**, 2D

Tickets

Garrison Keillor, with singer Kate MacKenzie and pianist Richard Dworsky, perform tonight at 8 at the Flynn Theatre, 153 Main St., Burlington.

■ Tickets are \$27.50, \$23.50 and \$18.50; deduct \$4 for children under 17. Information: 863-5966.

■ Chassman & Bem Booksellers will sell Keillor's books. Keillor will sign books after the show.

GUYS: Keillor knows Vermont

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guests, in hopes of garnering recommendations for future employment, graduate school, etc.

The story is interspersed with commercials for high-priced products (a dozen juicy Vermont apples for \$15) that cash in on the Vermont cachet.

Keillor first learned about Vermont from his friend, cartoonist Ed Koren, whose bushy-haired, big-beaked characters appear regularly in the New Yorker magazine. Koren is New York City refugee now living in Brookfield.

"To a Midwesterner, Vermont is kind of literary," Keillor said. "It's Robert Frost, basically, and it's rectitude, the Congregational Church and neoclassical architecture.

"But when I find a Vermontophile, a true believer, a convert, a man who even belongs to the volunteer fire department there in Brookfield, and who is a passionate believer in volunteer fire

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departments, then I have something to satire."

Although Keillor denies that "The Book of Guys" responds to the men's movement, which urges men to get in touch with their emotions, the book's introduction clearly satirizes that movement's fireside, feel-good sharing sessions. As in this excerpt:

"We're selling out our manhood, bit by bit, trying to buy a little peace and quiet, and you know something? It won't work. Self-betrayal never works! I say, nuts to sensitivity. Go ahead and fart. Go ahead."

"So we did. All at once. The fire flamed up blazing bright. It felt good."

"Guys have been trying to be satisfactory," Keillor said. "They've been trying to be acceptable and to win a seal of approval from women, and this is just as ridiculous for men as it would

be if women lived their lives trying to win our approval.

"Men must consider their lives on their own, without regard to women. We can't define ourselves by women, and all of the characters are really on their own. They have to face up to it themselves, and not through women, or through their relationships."

The last time Keillor was in Vermont, he was scoping out a potential new home for his radio program. A true Midwesterner, he has since decided to stay in Minnesota.

New Yorkers are more likely candidates than he for conversion to Vermontism, he said.

"They just drive up there and fall all over themselves," he said. "Nobody's shrieking at them, and panhandlers don't line the county road, and they're dazed by the beauty. It's a quick slide for a New Yorker.

"But Minnesotans, we're not so easily swayed by all that rectitude."