

# Tales from Lake Wobegon

Radio legend Garrison Keillor will share stories at SPAC



Master storyteller Garrison Keillor will perform Friday, Sept. 1, with the Saratoga Festival Orchestra.

By Matthew Crowley  
Staff Writer

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Garrison Keillor's mythical Lake Wobegon is off in some remote corner of Minnesota. Far away, but so familiar you could imagine it up the road anywhere.

Regular folks struggle through regular lives. They swat overly large mosquitoes in the summer, shovel through eye-level snowdrifts in the winter, go to work and hope to get by. Lake Wobegon is imaginary, but the people and their feelings seem real.

**Garrison Keillor.** 8:15 p.m. Friday, Sept. 1, at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center. Accompanied by the Saratoga Festival Orchestra and conductor Philip Brunelle. Tickets: \$17.50 amphitheater, \$10 lawn.

More than a million radio listeners tune in to visit Lake Wobegon each week when Keillor performs "A Prairie Home Companion" on National Public Radio. The show airs locally on Albany's WAMC 90.3FM. Millions more people have bought Keillor's books or recorded "Lake Wobegon" stories on cassette.

Now Keillor will spin his tales locally, performing Friday, Sept. 1, at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center. He will perform with conductor Philip Brunelle and the Saratoga Festival Orchestra.

Keillor, 53, trained as a journalist at the University of Minnesota and eventually got a job writing humorous essays for *The New Yorker* magazine.

Keillor's dream, though, was having a

**See Stories: Page D6**

<h2>Stories</h2> <p><b>From Page D1</b></p> <p>radio program, someplace to tell his own humorous stories. In college, as a disc jockey for a classical radio station, Keillor he discovered he could ignore his bashfulness and speak comfortably.</p> <p>Minnesota helped nurture Keillor's career. Minnesota Public Radio carried "A Prairie Home Companion" for more than a decade. Then, when NPR declined to carry the show in 1982, Minnesota Public Radio helped start its own network, American Public Radio, to get "A Prairie Home Companion" distributed nationally.</p> <p>In 1987, Keillor and his home state had a falling out. Keillor had left his longtime companion and former "Prairie Home Companion" producer Margaret Moos to marry Ulla Skaerved.</p> <p>Keillor had known Skaerved in high school, and romance blossomed when the two met at a 25th reunion of the high school class.</p> <p>Minnesotans reacted most unfavorably. The local newspapers wrote scathing articles about Keillor, chastising him for leaving Moos, who'd helped create the storyteller's success. One Twin Cities paper even printed a front-page photograph of the St. Paul, Minn., house Keillor and Skaerved bought, complete with address and price paid.</p> <p>Furious, Keillor pulled the plug on "A Prairie Home Companion" and left Minnesota for Denmark. The overseas exile was short-lived, though.</p> <p>In 1989, Keillor resurfaced in Manhattan to present a new show, "The American Radio Company." The show traveled to major cities including New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Nashville, Tenn., and London.</p>	<h2>Brunelle to conduct for Keillor</h2> <p>Philip Brunelle is artistic director and founder of the Plymouth Music series of Minnesota. He served 17 seasons as director of the Minnesota Opera.</p> <p>Brunelle conducted extensively in Europe, appearing with the English Chamber Orchestra, the Philharmonia Choir of London in England and the Swedish Royal Opera, among others.</p> <p>Brunelle has worked with Garrison Keillor since the inaugural broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" in 1974.</p> <p>Brunelle and Keillor have collaborated on several orchestral programs and recordings, including "Songs of the Cat: Lake Wobegon Revisited" and "Lake Wobegon Loyalists Days."</p>	<p>In 1993, Keillor revived "A Prairie Home Companion" and returned to Minnesota. The show has been broadcast Saturday nights ever since.</p> <p>Although he's stopped writing for <i>The New Yorker</i>, his writings have appeared recently in <i>The New York Times Magazine</i> and <i>Life</i> magazine. His books include "Happy to Be Here," "Leaving Home," "Lake Wobegon Days," "WLT: A Radio Romance" and "The Book of Guys."</p> <p>Keillor's radio and performance genius begins with his folksy delivery. He needs no big-time-media-person inflection; he talks as if conversing, as if the audience were in the chair next to him.</p> <p>Then, there are Keillor's stories: wry and wise.</p> <p>He's told stories about a teen-ager waiting all night in the cold for concert tickets, only to have his mother examine them pensively with a matchbook. He's told a story about a minister declining a glamorous church-subsidized trip, only to raise the ire of his travel-starved wife.</p> <p>Like the great novelists, Keillor draws his characters with simple, cogent details. In his recent book, "The Book of Guys," he describes a lonely, single disc jockey this way:</p> <p>"... (he has) a smooth voice in the night and even though he doesn't say much, you know that this man has had some bad haircuts in his day and lost a true love or two."</p> <p>"This man has come home to empty rooms and confronted Sunday mornings that stretched for weeks. He has wandered trashy streets at 2 a.m. imagining that happiness might emerge from an alley and take him by the hand. He has known futility and grief in full measure."</p> <p>Keillor's a throwback to earlier times, when people passed time listening to the radio and let their imaginations draw the pictures. Like Wobegon's pictures emerge colorful and tangible. It's someplace where everyone is seemingly prosperous and safe.</p> <p>It's someplace, where, as Keillor always says, the men are good-looking, the women are strong and the children are always above average.</p>
---	---	--