

Keillor's appeal is his unprofessional style

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Boutique or Guy's Shoes ("Try them on — they're no worse than any other shoes").

Keillor puts his weekly show together with the kind of unpretentious efficiency you would expect from the humorist.

"I start writing the show on Thursday morning," he said. "Late on Friday, we get the actors together and the music director, and we run through the script. . . . We make a tape of them, and I sit and listen to it. It's my chance to hear this as radio. So I listen, and I figure out that they're not going to work, so I write something else."

Keillor's appeal is his unprofessional style, which seems to mock the slick, no-risk kind of shows that inundate most American airwaves, TV and radio. Without cloying our arteries, he evokes a nostalgia for family and for a slower, simpler time.

The style comes naturally. Keillor isn't acting. He's really *that* laid-back.

"I'm just an extremely slow person. My metabolism must be like a hibernating wolverine."

Still, back in 1988, it got to be too much for him. After 13 years of emceeing *A Prairie Home Companion*, he signed off.

"I left because I was tired. Probably a summer off was all I

'Home' musical companions

Three musical groups from southern Arizona will share air time with Garrison Keillor when he broadcasts his weekly radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*, nationwide from Tucson's Centennial Hall on Saturday.

The groups, Dean Armstrong and his Arizona Dance Hands, Mariachi America, and Southern

Scratch, represent a mix of Western, mariachi and chicken scratch.

Tickets for the 4 p.m. show are sold out, but it will be broadcast Saturday at 6 p.m. on KJZZ-FM (91.5) and in Tucson on KUAT-FM (90.5). It will air again on KJZZ at 10 a.m. Sunday and in Tucson on KUAT-AM (1550) and KUAZ-FM (89.1).

needed. We were doing 48 shows a year back then."

Now he considers leaving the show "the dumbest thing I ever did in my life." He did a four-year stint with his New York-based program, *The American Radio Company*, then, in 1992, he returned to *Prairie*.

He's doing 33 shows a year, which he says "seems like a more reasonable season."

Over the years, Keillor has been compared to Mark Twain and Will Rogers. The Radio Hall of Fame, into which Keillor was inducted last year, described him as "contemporary radio's most inventive humorist."

The key to his success is his gift for spinning a good yarn. Good stories cannot be hurried, the master story-

teller says. They should be experienced with a friend you've known a long time, so that he will be patient with you.

"I love stories that don't seem contrived, stories that perhaps the storyteller doesn't quite know what the point of it is, and is simply telling the best that he remembers of a sequence of events that strikes him as important, even if he isn't quite sure why.

"I love stories that the storyteller isn't sure what the moral of it is, or even if there is one. But he thinks — if he can just defeat time and go back and be there again, through an exact remembrance of detail — that somehow he'll be able to figure it out this time."

Keillor yarns warm fans like fresh-baked bread

By Bill Jones
Staff writer

It's hard to imagine anything legal that's more soothing to the spirit than Garrison Keillor.

His bedside voice, his down-home manner, his humor, his tales of his fictional Lake Wobegon — opiates for the ears.

For a couple of hours on his radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*, Keillor pacifies our troubled past and appeases our uncertain future, and reminds us of the simple beauty of the here and now.

The tall, 53-year-old Minnesotan with a boyish face and horn-rimmed glasses will broadcast his show nationwide from Tucson's Centennial Hall on Saturday at 4 p.m. Tickets for the show are sold out, but the program will air Saturday at 6 p.m. on radio stations KUAT in Tucson and KJZZ in Phoenix. The program will air again on KJZZ on Sunday at 10 a.m.

Keillor has staged *A Prairie Home Companion* twice before in Arizona, once in Tempe and once in Tucson. He says he always tries to orient his shows to the region in which he's performing.

"People love to hear stories about themselves," he said. "They love to hear themselves talked about, so long as the storyteller is honorable and tells the truth, but not too much of it."

During his travels across the country, Keillor says he's noticed a difference in audiences.

"People out East and people out West are a little quicker than people in the Midwest. A Midwestern audience is a little more cautious. They're not sure this is really such wonderful stuff on stage, not sure that guy is all that funny. So you don't want to be the first person to laugh at a joke, or the first person on your feet for a standing O. You want to keep a lid on it."

With an estimated listenership of 2 million, Keillor's *A Prairie Home Companion* is broadcast to 340 public-radio stations. The two-hour variety show is a potpourri of



Associated Press

"People love to hear stories about themselves," radio-show host Garrison Keillor says.

comedy sketches, local talent, music (folk, gospel, jazz, bluegrass, opera), and Keillor's signature monologue, "The News From Lake Wobegon," "where all the women are strong, the men are good-looking and the children are above-average."

Every act on the show is infused with Keillor's wry wit, including the commercials for emporiums such as Bertha's Kitty

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