

AN EVENING WITH SAROYAN ON THE LAKE

BY EDNA SHAMLIAN HARVEY



L to R: Paul Kalinian, Susie Kalinian, Vatche Soghomonian

The latest showing of Paul Kalinian's film, "William Saroyan: The Man The Writer," was a dazzling success under a canopy of starlight and the glow of a full moon. Mr. Vatche Soghomonian and his wife, Dr. Jane Kardashian hosted and underwrote the benefit dinner for the Armenian Studies Department of California State University, Fresno, at their beautiful home above Lake Millerton the evening of May 6, 2001.

The hosts graciously provided an elegant Armenian meal that seemed to last all evening. Many delectable dishes from Yerevan Restaurant, Fresno, covered the tables, then trays of pilaf and kebabs came until all could eat no more. There was ample room for the approximately 200 guests to eat outdoors on the expansive

deck and enjoy the reflecting moonlight on the lake.

Interesting speakers and enjoyable entertainment filled the evening before darkness fell and the film could begin. Mr. Vatche Soghomonian warmly greeted his guests on behalf of himself and the Armenian Studies Department. California State Senator Chuck Poochigian addressed the gathering with good wishes and pleasant memories of his youth. In Uncle Manook's shoe repair shop in the old White Front store, the young Poochigian would listen to his uncle and William Saroyan discuss the matters of the day. These memories were obviously precious.

U. S. Representative George Radanovich was represented by his dis-

standing and experience.

Throughout the film Saroyan's strengths and weakness were shown without compromise. His own inability to hold a family together, his failures with his children, his weakness for chance But the sheer joy and enthusiasm for living that Saroyan had and the beauty of his gift for writing were inspiring. School children who will see this film will learn many life lessons that will help them through both the good and difficult times of life. As well, the adult viewers will get a sense of appreciation for a life lived to the fullest.

Since 1991, the Kalinians have shown this outstanding film to over one million people in 19 countries and 53 cities around the world, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Europe, Turkey, Middle East, and Armenia. All the proceeds have directly benefited local charities. Paul Kalinian has been warmly honored wherever he has traveled as he has brought appreciation to William Saroyan's life and works. The Kalinians will eventually premier the film in South America, Africa, and Japan. Another European film tour is underway for next year, 2002.

After the film presentation, Paul Kalinian, director/writer of the film was invited to the podium. He emphasized the importance of the medium of film, as the only way a nation and its culture can be most powerfully and effectively presented to the world, and preserved for the generations to come.

A very pleasant surprise was the appearance of Susie Kalinian, producer of the film and daughter of Paul Kalinian. As an alumni of the Armenian Studies program and CSUF, Susie spoke of her fond memories and praised the program. As producer of the film, she was particularly thrilled to be able to contribute to the program, through this benefit showing. Susie currently lives in Boston, Massachusetts, where she is a predoctoral student at Tufts School of Dental Medicine. Also present was Paul's wife, Araxie, and son Harold, the film's technical engineer.

The previous Fresno viewing was at Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church

tract director, Mr. Steve Samuelian, who spoke of his days in Fresno State's Armenian Studies program and highly praised its contribution to his own education, and its benefit to others.

Professor Barlow Der Mugrdchian had outright fun recognizing student leaders, students from Armenia, scholarship recipients and outlining a busy, productive year for the department. The students attending well represented their department and its mission. The next exciting activity will be a tour of Armenia with 18 students. Music and vocal offerings by Cherie Chooljian brought the evening to darkness and the film presentation.

Paul Kalinian's biographical film of William Saroyan highlighted a thoroughly enjoyable evening. The film has won six international film festival awards, including a Gold award for best documentary. Saroyan's life was depicted honestly and with sensitivity to a complex man with

a booming voice and a big heart full of stories. Much of the narration was by Saroyan himself! The man's voice brought his own spirit to the artistic photography by Mr. Kalinian. Additional narration was done by internationally known actor, Mike Connors.

The film begins with the immigrant family and young American born William Saroyan tells of his father's desire to minister, and failure to produce financial security for the family. In scenes like this, and the telling of his father's death and years in an orphanage, the viewer feels the tenderness in Saroyan's voice. Young William's youthful return to Fresno offered the opportunity for his love of this area to develop and color a lifetime of writing.

I particularly enjoyed the vignette about the young Armenian school chil-

Continued on page 26

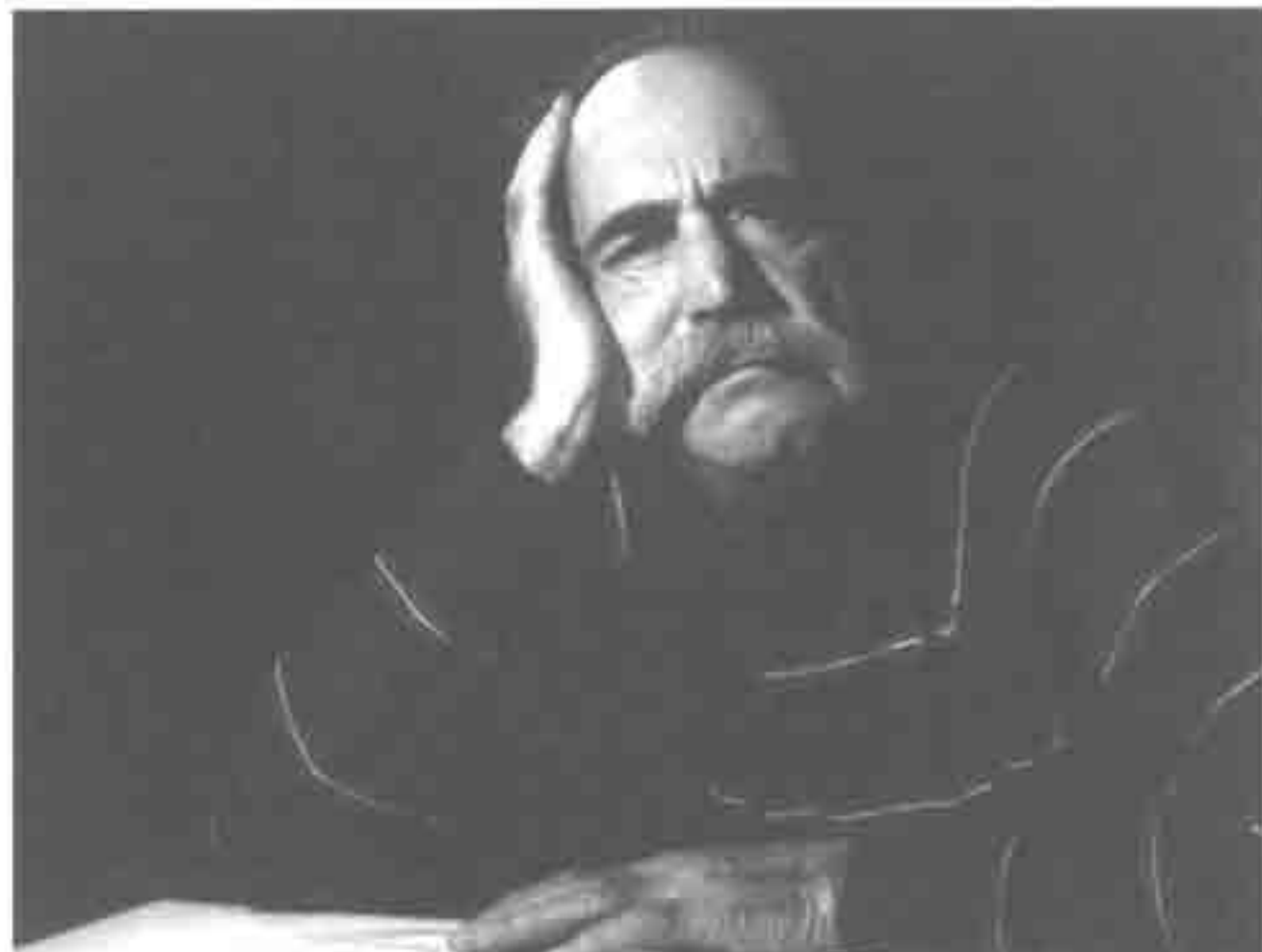


photo by Paul Kalinian ©

William Saroyan

SAROYAN

Continued from page 21

dren being told by their offended teacher to stop eating so much garlic for lunch. The children were not happy about this. But it was young Saroyan who told her to "Open the window!" It seems that his talent for getting to the heart of the matter was developed at an early age. Stories such as this one were illustrated by drawings, period photographs, and actors re-enacting the parts. This variety kept the viewers continually interested and anticipating what was to come next. Every frame of this film was a perfect blend of picture, voice, and original music composed by Paul Nazlikian which also won an award.

As the film progressed personal gems by the writer were shared such as discrimination for being Armenian. Saroyan said that it made him "determine, accept, and state who [he] was." This personal accepting of his own identity became the foundation of his literary work. Simply stated concepts such as this made his writing so appealing and this film captivating.

Mike Connors narrated a literary history which included sixty of Saroyan's published books during his life time. It was clear that only a small bit of his prolific writing ever found print. Saroyan so hated agents and the business aspect of writing that he eventually wrote for the love of it and published little. His personal identity and written identity were not to be compromised. He won the Academy Award for the screenplay of "The Human Comedy", and refused it because of unauthorized changes. Saroyan knew his mind and his work. Mr. Kalinian knows the mind and person of William Saroyan and beautifully brought the viewers to appreciate him too.

Footage of Saroyan in his later years was available for this film and brought life to this period. Particularly effective was the showing of Saroyan's visit to Armenia and his experiencing the fullness of heart and spirit in the land of his father. In these sensitive and touching moments of this film the music added depth of under-

- the red brick church made famous by Saroyan himself. This presentation was part of the year long celebration of their 100th anniversary. A light lunch of lahmajoon and salad was served and Armenian pastries were offered for sale by the youth group.

On October 27 and 28, 2001, the film will be shown at the Fresno Memorial Auditorium organized by the Fresno County Public Library. For information about the film, please visit: <http://members.aol.com/kalinian/saroyan.html>

Paul Kalinian's film is outstanding! I recommend it for anyone interested in Saroyan, literature, or a life well lived. Mr. Kalinian asks for criticism of his film, but it is impossible to accommodate him. The film is superb!

ABOUT 5,000 ARMENIAN

f f f i f n 7 F a F r F a s t F c e r t c	e h f n f g : e e y - c e t y d - - e i- i- -
---	--

form their duty before you, and you.