

CALIFORNIA NEWS

"I Saw Saroyan's Soul . . . More Than Even That, I Felt Kalinian's Soul"

By Fran Foth

FRESNO, CA - Last night, April 19, 2002, at 7:30 p.m., my husband and I viewed, with great appreciation, a documentary film on the life and works of William Saroyan, entitled "William Saroyan: The Man The Writer," at the Fresno Art Museum in Bonner Theatre with full capacity audience. The two-day Saroyan film presentation events were sponsored by the Fresno County Public Library and The William Saroyan Society.

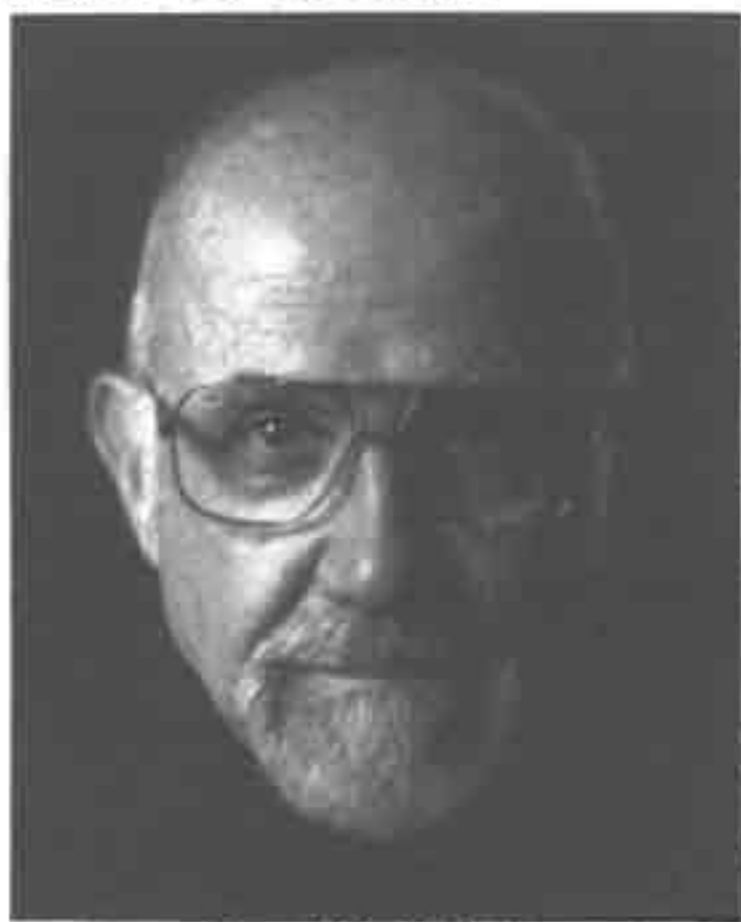
Following the showing of the film, we met and spoke to Mr. Paul Kalinian, the writer/director of the film who produced the film with his daughter Susie Kalinian. Mr. Kalinian asked me, "What did you like best about the film?" I said, "The whole thing." However, with some thought regarding his question, I will be more specific. Paul Kalinian was able to capture William Saroyan's soul and words in film. I saw his soul... more than even that, I felt Kalinian's soul.

I have never met William Saroyan, the great author, but I know him now. The artistry of Kalinian has portrayed Saroyan with such skill that his soul is bared and opened before the viewer of "William Saroyan: The Man The Writer" documentary film. Rarely is a person so open to the very depths of his being. Only God generally knows that part of man.

The outward appearance of William Saroyan could be considered somewhat gruff and his speech, at times, confirmed it. That was not who he was, however. He was a man of honesty, integrity, tenderness, and strong feelings. He was able to vividly express those feelings. If he was happy, he thoroughly enjoyed the happiness. If he felt anger, he was unafraid of it and safely revealed it.

I have deep respect for the suffering Saroyan experienced simply because he was Armenian. With his dogged determination, he overcame what could have denied the entire world of his great art. He was proud to be Armenian and unashamed to let it be known. That, in itself, would have contributed greatly to his success as the author of more than 60 books published during his lifetime.

As I viewed the documentary, I recalled the racial prejudice in my high school in San Francisco during World War II when the United States and other countries were at war with Germany and Japan. I saw the abuse towards German people. The students were frequently asked to fill in forms stating our nation-



Paul Kalinian

alities. I merely claimed to be Caucasian. I was not as brave as Saroyan. I also witnessed the persecution of my German teacher. Students threw things at him and poked him as he passed in the halls of the school and called out obscenities. Our church leaders were told, "There will be no more sermons spoken in the German language."

I know of many Armenians whose families have escaped the torment of the Ottoman Empire in their country. They migrated to the United States and have contributed greatly to the development of the valley and the entire country. In the areas of similarity to William Saroyan's family, my husband and my grandparents migrated to America from the suffering and persecution they experienced religiously and racially in Russia after Catherine The Great died. They became professional business people, farmers, scientists, and in a variety of fields of work, contributing to the building of America and making it what it is today.

I consider myself thoroughly blessed to be in America. I can now boldly say that I am proud to be an American with the heritage of Germans from Russia. Saroyan is a prime example of excellence in his field of building a better life here in America. In the film, Saroyan expressed his passion to his beloved countries in these words; "I love Armenia, I love America, I belong to both..."

The name of William Saroyan is everywhere in Fresno. He is a person to be recognized. Paul Kalinian pursued him and, while accepting his insults, determined to find Saroyan, the whole person, by film, through his life's experiences, and personal acquaintance with him. Kalinian has done a masterful work in his documentary. I am personally very grateful for his insight and ability to recognize greatness.

It is a tremendous gift that Kalinian had to be able to relay to his audience clearly the message he had inside of himself.

It was a very worthwhile evening.