

## Saroyan Film Tour in Israel

BY YEHUDA ATLAS  
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*The Cinematheque Movie Theaters of Israel, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Interior, invited Paul & Araxie Kalinian to premiere their documentary film, William Saroyan: The Man The Writer, in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem in September 2005. The film was also presented to the Armenian community, at the Armenian Patriarchate Seminary Hall, in the old city of Jerusalem. All the proceeds of the film presentations were generously donated by the Kalinians, to the organizing committee.*

In Israel, the name of William Saroyan claims a very special place in our memories, especially for me and for my generation during the 1930's and 1940's. Thanks to The Human Comedy, my friends and I felt, for the first time in our lives, the feelings of brotherhood with the entire human race. The Macaulay family from Santa Clara Avenue, in Ithaca, California, represented to us the human family. We loved them all: Ulysses, Homer, Bess, Marcas, Marna Macaulay, old Mr. Grogan, and the black man on the passing train, waving to Ulysses and singing "My Old Kentucky Home." Even the chapter headings fascinated us: "A Better World, A Better People," "Be Happy! Be Happy!," "There Will Be Always Pain In Things," "Love Is Immortal, Hate Dies Every Minute." They indicated human beings are connected by invisible ties of brotherhood, joy and sorrow, hope and belief in goodness. That in the human existence, happiness, in spite of everything, is possible.

In my high school years, we loved the stories of Saroyan translated into the Hebrew language, The Human Comedy, Tracy's Tiger, My Name Is Aram, The Adventures of Wesley Jackson, Short Drive, Sweet Chariot, and the most touching story of all was Laughing Sam, about the little newspaper boy who laughed when he felt like crying. Saroyan's books had an interesting and fascinating world, where people lived exciting lives. His books were our only access to knowledge, and reading was our only escape from loneliness, isolation, and a drudging routine.

Sometimes the love for reading in childhood creates the writers of adulthood. In addition to my work as a journalist and editor for an Israeli newspaper, I have written 22 books dealing with the everyday life of children, expressing their problems, hesitations, fears and difficulties. My love for children's literature led me to write a three-volume book for adults, entitled The Child Within, about children's writers, writer-illustrators and their work. The second volume, dedicated to American writers, includes a chapter about William Saroyan. Although he is considered a writer for adults, remembering the love for his books by young readers convinced me to include him as a writer for children.

Following the book's publication, I began to present lectures about children's writers, including a brief video. It was during this research that I discovered Saroyan's documentary film on the Internet, written and directed by Mr. Paul Kalinian and produced by his daughter Dr. Susie Kalinian, who have made the only documentary film on Saroyan's life and works. When I e-mailed Kalinian asking to purchase a copy, he replied that the film was not yet available for sale; however, he was available for screening tours with the film, as he has done so all over the world. "But I can't invite you to Israel," I responded. "Why can't you?" he replied. I asked myself the same question and then made a call to my friend Mr. Alon Garbus, the director of Cinematheque Organization in Tel Aviv, to invite the Kalinians to Israel to premiere their film. After six-



Paul Kalinian during question-and-answer session

teen months of emailing and preparation, Garbus and I greeted Mr. & Mrs. Paul & Araxie Kalinian at the Tel Aviv airport on September 20, 2005.

The people who came to watch the film were true admirers of Saroyan, and their love and interest were shown before, during and after the screening. I was Master of Ceremonies for all three screenings, which were followed by a question-and-answer session with Writer/Director Paul Kalinian. Before the film, I gave a short lecture about Saroyan and his place in American literature. After the film presentation, Kalinian answered the audiences' questions and shed more light and told us about his meeting with Saroyan and his inspiration for making the film. One audience member asked, "Why wasn't Saroyan's trip to Israel included in the film?" Another inquired, "Why were there no interviews with other family members?"

Kalinian responded, "Saroyan traveled all over the world and felt at home in many different cities, but he used to say the cardinal point of his spiritual map was Armenia, and that wherever he was, he always 'longed for Armenia.' He felt great pride in his Armenian and American heritage and its contribution and influence on his becoming a writer. Therefore, as mentioned in the film, Saroyan requested that, upon his death, half of his cremated remains be buried in Armenia and the other half in Fresno, California."

In regards to interviewing family members, Kalinian replied, "Although family members were approached, they were not interested." He jokingly added, "My one-hour documentary easily exceeded six hours, prior to editing!"

In my opinion, the film is not an objective 'scientific' documentary; it is a warm homage to a great writer by a friend, an admirer and a fellow Armenian. Kalinian's love for Saroyan and the deep appreciation for his work and humanitar-

ian speech in the Armenian language (surprising most), even the changes in the length and style of Saroyan's mustache over time, can be appreciated. Paul Kalinian, and his daughter, Producer Dr. Susie Kalinian, in charge of script research, public relations, casting, make-up, and costume design, have done a tremendous job of collecting, researching, editing, and interlacing this beautiful story into a one-hour documentary film. The film is narrated by film star, Mike Connors, and accompanied by a musical score composed by Paul Nazlikian. The film has won 6 International Film Festival Awards: five for the filmmakers and one for the music composer, including the



William Saroyan  
(photographed by Paul Kalinian)

Gold Award, for Best Documentary Film, from the Philadelphia International Film Festival. Kalinian is also known for his characteristic portrait of Saroyan, which was jointly selected by the USA & the USSR postal services for their 1991 commemorative stamps.

I saw the film three times, and each time I discovered a new angle, new facts, new expressions. Kalinian concluded his lecture in these words: "The purpose of this non-profit documentary film is to preserve and to present the legacy, works, and dual cultural heritage of William Saroyan, for the study and enjoyment of our generation and the generations to come, and to create the spirit of brotherhood and understanding among all nations."

I would like to thank this opportunity to thank the sponsors of Mr. & Mrs. Kalinian's trip to Israel, and most importantly to the Kalinians for making and sharing such an exceptional film with us. We are pleased to note that Israel is the neighboring country to Lebanon, where Paul and Araxie Kalinian were born and raised. I am confident that these three screenings in Israel have greatly contributed to the knowledge and the sentiment of the admirers of Saroyan, the great Armenian-American writer, playwright and humanitarian.

### OMISSION

Several lines were inadvertently omitted from the bottom paragraph of the second column (from left) and the top paragraph of the third column of "Saroyan Film Tour in Israel" (p. 14, January 21, 2006). The complete paragraphs are given below. Our apologies go to the writer, Yehuda Atlas, Paul and Susie Kalinian, and our readers.

In my opinion, the film is not an objective 'scientific' documentary; it is a warm homage to a great writer by a friend, an admirer and a fellow Armenian. Kalinian's love for Saroyan and the deep appreciation for his work and humanitarian message are evident throughout the film. There is much material about Saroyan's greatness, yet Kalinian touches upon his darker side as well. Being quick to mention that Saroyan was a gambler, a heavy drinker, had problems with the IRS, and estrangement, at times, from his wife and children.

The film, a labor of love, took over eight long years of collecting image after image, foot after foot, recreating scenes, pursuing an authentic background and history, and bringing the character of William Saroyan to life. Admirers of the great American writer will always retain unforgettable images and moments from the film. Saroyan talking about his life, riding his bicycle, visiting Armenia, making a long speech in the Armenian language (surprising most), even the changes in the length and style of Saroyan's mustache over time, can be appreciated. Paul Kalinian, and his daughter, Producer Dr. Susie Kalinian, in charge of script research, public relations, casting, make-up, and costume design, have done a tremendous job of collecting, researching, editing, and interlacing this beautiful story into a one-hour documentary film. The film is narrated by film star, Mike Connors, and accompanied by a musical score composed by Paul Nazlikian. The film has won 6 International Film Festival Awards: five for the filmmakers and one for the music composer, including the Gold Award, for Best Documentary Film, from the Philadelphia International Film Festival. Kalinian is also known for his characteristic portrait of Saroyan, which was jointly selected by the USA & the USSR postal services for their 1991 commemorative stamps.