

## CALIFORNIA NEWS - CALIFORNIA NEWS - CALIFORNIA NEWS

## NAASR/UCLA Near East Center Hold Saroyan Observance

By Janet Samuelian  
Exclusive to TAR Int'l

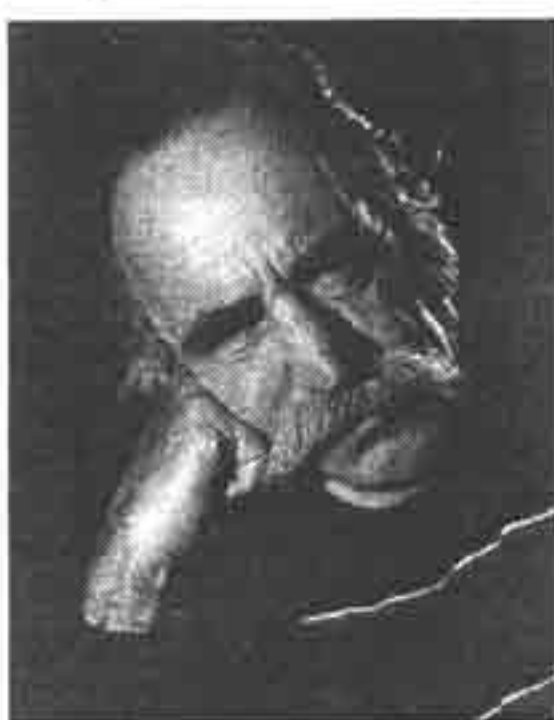
LOS ANGELES, CA - At the heart of a very special afternoon on the UC campus here Jan. 26 were featured speaker, Dr. David S. Calonne, Associate English Professor, Siena Heights College, and Visiting Lecturer in both Armenian Studies and English at U-M, Ann Arbor, and Paul Kalinian presenting his documentary "William Saroyan: The Man, The Writer." Dr. S. Peter Cowe, Visiting Associate Professor to the Narekatsi Chair of Armenian Language and Literature, represented the University and thanked participants: the Southern California branch of NAASR, UCLA von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, and the Armenian Students Association. He welcomed the rain-soaked audience who had skipped the Super Bowl to attend.

Charter member, Dr. Pierre Haig, reviewed the origins of NAASR's evolution from the unavailability of books in English for those doing research on Armenian subjects, to establishing Armenian Chairs at both Harvard and UCLA. Among NAASR books for sale in the lobby were limited copies of **William Saroyan, My Real Work is Being** written by David Calonne in 1983, with a foreword by Dickran Kouymjian.

### SAROYAN: LITERARY GENIUS REDISCOVERED

Dr. Calonne addressed the many students on his own UCLA background: "I went to University Elementary School right here on campus, studied classics, had music lessons here in Schoenberg Hall, the whole area was my stomping grounds." He repeated a phrase in krapar he learned in lessons with Dr. Sanjian -- "I see you with great joy" -- and said his Fresno grandparents, Vagharshak and Flora Galoostian, first took him to meet Saroyan.

"I knew in high school that William Saroyan was intuitive and original, and saying things out of the mainstream. WASP types were insensitive to Saroyan. But time has caught up with him now, with multiculturalism, and made him relevant....his legacy's being rediscovered," said Calonne. Beside being ethnically sensitive early on, his was a philosophic message resembling Heidegger's: the individual expression each human being strives for. "Saroyan answers to the possi-



William Saroyan in 1976  
(photo by Paul Kalinian)



Paul Kalinian and David Calonne, Ph.D. at UCLA Saroyan program on January 26, 1997

bilities of a solitary creative person, the artist as a redemptive figure. It makes him appealing as a romantic, trying to find the individual's answer to life's questions."

Calonne said Saroyan's fresh, unencumbered English, spontaneous, energetic and anti-authority style recall Walt Whitman -- "The American impulse is immediate and direct, avoiding the archaic. As a young boy he was already sensitive to what America was about."

Extraordinary, with its jazz poetics racing along, were paragraphs Calonne read from Saroyan's 1937 story "Baby" published in 3 x 3. Calling it a new voice, full of fresh images and alliteration, Calonne made a comparison with a staid 44-meter verse of Robert Frost's. "I got a chill again, reading that...this stylistic jazziness of Saroyan's," he said.

Calonne surveyed other contemporary writers and said, "There's very little ethnic edge, even in Steinbeck, very few writers where

every nationality is mentioned. Saroyan makes a point he's going to mention every kind of person...I never came home to pitchers of milk and Oreos," said Prof. Calonne. "It's a misrepresentation of the world, the human race. I came home to pilaf and mad intensity of half-Armenian and half-French Canadian. His portrayal of black characters came early, in 1942, in 'Talking to You.' So we should go back and find him, he's really speaking to us -- in terms of philosophizing, existential/romantic. The struggle takes place within each individual who only relies on himself. His existential message is not as depressing as Sartre's or Camus' -- his existential theme is balanced by fun, jab, he fights back versus melancholy that's in his own nature!"

"In Canadian Richard Buck's biography of Walt Whitman, he said that great poets intuited the affirmative reality of the universe, of life. Critics got Saroyan wrong that he was PollyAnish -- he's trying to affirm the sense of community. So his genius is relevant today." Calonne commented on the connection between religious feeling and artistic creativity. He concluded about Saroyan: "Why is the Armenian theme so important? If you drive out of Los Angeles into the Central Valley, feel the rich soil, remember his roots in the San Joaquin, his essential physicality....up there is an archaic depth of feeling in the blood. "khent," dreamers, poets of the soul. They don't seem crazy in Armenia, only here among the white people. Armenians are Dionysians, they focus on food, family and fundamentals." Banging the lectern top for emphasis, he said, "Saroyan deserves your attention, read him!"

### SAROYAN DOCUMENTARY BY KALINIAN

The Kalinian family graciously traveled from Fresno to present their educational tribute to William Saroyan, fashioned with care and ingenuity. Kalinian reported that the film just won its sixth award, for music composition, at the Philadelphia International Film Festival. Mostly under the auspices of AGBU, writer-producer-director Paul Kalinian has toured here and abroad, at packed screenings in Canada and Australia. A European tour beginning with Switzerland will continue soon to England, Austria, France and Italy. Question-and-answer sessions always follow screenings, he says; requests have come in from as far away as Japan.

During the reception following the film showing, Mr. Kalinian admitted it is beyond his financial ability to reproduce the film in video format to sell. He voluntarily promotes the documentary all over the world, yet no one has thought to buy the rights to his 16-mm film. It is an extraordinary portrait of William Saroyan's life. Also on hand were the May '91 joint USA-USSR Commemorative Postal Stamp Cachets with the original portrait of Saroyan taken by Paul Kalinian in 1976, when they first met. For further information call (209) 252-2102.



Participants of the January 26th Saroyan Memorial Program: (l. to r.) Susan Kalinian and father Paul Kalinian (filmmakers), featured speaker David Calonne, Ph.D., UCLA host professor S. Peter Cowe, Ph.D., NAASR Board members Anne Vardanian, Ph.D., Pierre V. Haig, M.D., Alice Haig

Photos by Harout Bronozian/NAASR