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Presented By

OIA Cultural Committee

"WILLIAM SAROYAN: The Man The Writer"

by Sirvart Karaoglanyan

On Sunday, November 17, more than 250 people filled the Agajanian Hall of AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School in Canoga Park to watch the screening of "William Saroyan: The Man the Writer" and to meet its writer, director and producer Mr. Paul Kalinian. After welcoming everyone, OIA Cultural Committee Chairlady, Mrs. Nadia Barsamian introduced Mr. Kalinian, his wife Mrs. Araxie Kalinian and daughter Ms. Susie Kalinian, the co-producer of the film. Next, Mrs. Barsamian presented a brief biography of Mr. Kalinian. She then invited the audience to sit back, relax and enjoy this award-winning film on the life and works of an internationally renowned Armenian-American writer, playwright and humanitarian, William Saroyan.

The film highlights Saroyan's personal and professional life providing a glimpse of his character and philosophy, his message to the world, and his undying love and passion for both his native America and for the country of his forefathers, Armenia. In the film Saroyan discusses his cultural heritage and its great impact on his becoming a writer. He rejects money, fame and glory. He ultimately goes back to his roots and finds his final rest.

The story begins in Fresno, California, in the early 1900s and spans eight decades until the writer's death in 1981. The film opens with Saroyan reminiscing about his past. It continues with Mike Connors' narration of Saroyan's 60 year writing career, based on biographies, interviews, recordings, newspapers, magazine articles, his works, and Kalinian's personal experience with him. The film includes: the books Saroyan had published during his lifetime, excerpts of his own voice spoken in English and Armenian, an original music score composed by Paul Nazlikian, graphical illustration by Sarkis Muradyan, the city of Fresno-past and present, on location re-enactment scenes, home movies, rare footage, photographs, memorabilia and Saroyan's last visit to his ancestral homeland. The film is in color, sepia tone, and black & white.

At the end of the movie, before the house lights came on and the famous face of Saroyan was fading on the screen, the audience started applauding the Kalinians and kept applauding for a very long time. Then Mrs. Barsamian came to the stage announced that the film has begun touring the United States and abroad under the sponsorship of the AGBU. The world tour began with Mr. and Mrs. Kalinian premiering the film in San Francisco in December of 1995 and has continued through Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Phoenix, Toronto, Montreal, Sydney and Melbourne. The film will eventually tour also in Europe, Middle East, and finally in Yerevan. Mrs. Barsamian thanked Mr. Kalinian for volunteering his time to the organization and invited him to the stage to speak. Mr. Kalinian took the stage and after making few remarks, he started a question and answer period which lasted over forty-five minutes. One of the questions asked to him was: "How did making this movie has changed your life?" His answer was, "Now, my life revolves around this film. I have sold my studio and have committed myself to showing this movie all over the world." Mr. Kalinian was also asked if he were planning to convert the film into a video tape. He replied by saying that he does not have much knowledge about producing a commercial video. If such a professional company would approach him, he might consider it. He also informed the audience that he has three hours of film... about Saroyan.; however, he needs funding to produce the rest since this movie was produced by his personal funding only. At the conclusion of the question and answer period, the audience applauded Mr. Kalinian enthusiastically once again for his efforts.

Mrs. Barsamian then came to the stage and presented Mr. Kalinian with a plaque in appreciation of his exemplary work for the enrichment of Armenian culture.

Then she invited Miss Tanya Koseyan, a former student of Mrs. Barsamian at St. Peter Saturday School to deliver Saroyan's famous message, "The Armenian and the Armenian." Ms. Koseyan recited Saroyan's famous words beautifully, further lifting the spirits of those present.

Mrs. Barsamian announced that on display in the hall were USA and USSR commemorative stamps with firstday-issue cancellation and original stamp portrait of Saroyan taken by Kalinian in 1976 when they first met. She invited the audience to the reception and to meet the Kalinians personally.

The Kalinians were quickly surrounded by a small crowd and continued chatting questions until late hours while others purchased the rare stamps.

The purpose of this documentary film is to preserve and present the legacy, the works, and the dual cultural heritage of William Saroyan for the study and enjoyment of the present generation and the generations to come, and to create the spirit of brotherhood and understanding among all nations.

In April 1994, Paul Kalinian received the Finalist Award for "William Saroyan: The Man The Writer," from the 27th Worldlest-Houston International Film Festival. In June 1995, the film was presented at the Nouveau Festival International du Cinema, in Montreal, Canada. In July 1995, Kalinian received the Leigh Whipper Gold Award for Best Documentary Film from the 18th Annual Philadelphia International Film Festival. In October 1995, he recieved two Bronze Plaque Recognition of Excellent Awards in the division of The Arts an The Humanities, and an Honorable Mention Award for Scripting Writing, from the 43rd Anual Columbus International Film Festival.



Mrs. Barsamian presenting to Mr. Kalinian
a plaque of appreciation for his work