

Marcos Grigorian: Back to the earth Arpa Film Festival celebrates milestone

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**Leading lady
Karen Kondazian**



Adrineh Gregorian.

Tankian's *Elect the Dead* is raw

by Adrineh Gregorian

Elect the Dead plays out like the pages of singer-songwriter Serj Tankian's personal diary. Tankian is part artist and part political activist. This album is born of the marriage between the two parts.

The album comprises 12 songs. Each one is emotionally charged and undeniably a heartfelt plea for listeners to take notice of matters of politics and of the heart. The sound is as raw as the feelings expressed in the lyrics.

In *Elect the Dead*, his first solo album, Tankian does not stretch far from his roots with System Of A Down (SOAD).

Just two years after the release of SOAD's critically and commercially successful double album, *Mezmerize/Hypnotize*, Tankian has delved into his heart and poured his soul onto musical sheets.

It's hard not to compare *Elect the Dead* with SOAD's body of work, as SOAD's sound was closely identified with Tankian's voice. However, this album trades SOAD's recent theatrical appeal for more sincere outcries and capitalizes on the strength of Tankian's signature voice.

Elect the Dead is alternative metal close in vein to the sound that SOAD pioneered. The album is a throwback to the band's debut with songs engorged with overt messages, such as "P.L.U.C.K.," and goes to less whimsical places than were reached on *Mezmerize/Hypnotize*, such as "Radio/Video" and "Cigaro."

Compared to past SOAD albums, this record has a lot of soul and less Armenian influence. It's more rhythmically oriented and at the

same time less guitar driven. The music generally relies on the bass guitar to carry the melody behind Tankian's vocals.

The advantage of listening to this album is that you ride an emotional rollercoaster alongside Tankian – who wrote, produced, and played almost all the instruments featured on the tracks.

In short, this album is entirely him – though SOAD's John Dolmayan and Brian "Brain" Mantia (Primus, Tom Waits, Guns N Roses) contributed to the project, as did guitarist/bassist Dan Monti and opera soprano Ani Maldjian.

Elect the Dead is the outcry of a man tormented by a broken heart and a failed civilization.

The first single off *Elect the Dead* is the riveting "Empty Walls." It begins with strong guitar riffs signaling the start of this rock voyage. The lyrics serve as a wake-up call as Tankian belts out "don't waste your time on coffins today," with melodic bellows synonymous with his voice.

The album continues with strong metal sounds juxtaposed with softer melodies. Intros range from heavy guitar riffs to piano solos that launch tracks such as "Sky is Over," "Honking Antelope," "Lie Lie Lie," and "Elect the Dead."

"The Unthinking Majority," paves the way for tracks promulgating political awareness. All in all, oil, money, and lies contribute to the end of civilization unless we take action – or so declares "Sky is Over."

"Lie Lie Lie" is the sole song with a slight Armenian flare. Its double entendre alludes to lying politicians and love-torn relationships. Or, perhaps the deceitful union we find ourselves in with

dishonest world leaders. It's up to you to decide.

"Saving Us" is a ballad channeling a love-hate relationship, with the chorus chanting "you're tearing us, you're breaking us, you're killing us, you're saving us."

Following in its footsteps is "Baby," a song about missing a loved one yet wanting to be left alone.

The message in "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" is as clear as its title. It includes silly theatrics echoing the absurd American response to war. "Do we ever have enough, when we see that blue dove? We want to go where no one has been." Sounds conflict and clash together much like the divergent opinions on the U.S. administration's handling of the Iraq war.

The somber lullaby "Elect the Dead" is a plea for solitude. Lyrics include "All I want is me. Love comes from inside." Ironically, the album's namesake is less about electing vapid politicians, and more about choosing mortality over being without love, as indicated in the ending chorus, "All I want is you. All I need is you."

By putting out this forthright album Tankian is telling the world that he has arrived and is a force to be reckoned with.

Everything on *Elect the Dead* is what's expected of a solid rock album. It stands alone without profit-making accessibility. Songs range from the thought-provoking to unhealthy relationships – making me ponder the whole message. Is this a nasty love letter or a political diatribe? Either way, you're electing the death of something, whether it's a soul or a civilization. ✠

review

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On page C1: "Younger Armenians can encourage their children or brothers and sisters to find their hearts when it comes to art – because art is one of the few ways that people are going to know about us as a people," says actor Karen Kondazian, who wants to "show the world the beauty of our people." See page C11.

Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* revives memories of the man

by Andrew Kevorkian

Many years ago – probably the last time it happened – when Broadway mounted *The Time of Your Life*, *Life* magazine asked William Saroyan to review the production, which featured, among others, Henry Fonda as Joe.

Saroyan agreed, but said that he would do it from the comfort of his San Francisco home. Interestingly, *Life* agreed, and Saroyan's "review" was carried. What it amounted to, of course, was a Shavian "Preface" in which Saroyan dissected the work, and expounded on the world that he lived in. It wasn't a "review"; it was a great essay.

Years later, when I met him in Paris, I commented on it, and he smiled – that it was remembered, apparently. I asked why he didn't want to see it and do a proper review, and his answer was that if it was properly done, his comments would apply (and with Fonda in the cast, it was, indeed, properly done), but the other part of his answer surprised me. It suggested that he would have preferred that one of the others of his plays had been produced, at the time.

And even more years later, and this time in London, I was to hear the same about another of his works, *Hello, Out There*. His views on the many productions of *Hello* were almost on the level of Sergey Rachmaninov's regarding his C-sharp-minor prelude.

As far as Bill was concerned, he had a huge canon of work, and he thought that they were every bit as worthy as *Time* and *Hello*. And,



Edmond Genest and Andrew Weems in the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's production of *The Time of Your Life*. Photo: Gerry Goodstein.

even more years later, he gave me a list of some of his unmounted favorites. But that is another story.

When I said that *Time of Your Life* was a classic and he had to appreciate that not every playwright creates a classic, he grudgingly accepted it. Then – more to irritate him – I said that "just as there are the three Bs in music [Bach, Beethoven, Brahms], there are now the three Ss in the theater, Shakespeare, Shaw, Saroyan." He remarked, ignoring the flattery, "Who are the other two guys?"

All these memories come to mind with the production of *Time of Your Life* by the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, last month. Curmudgeon that he often liked to project himself, I am sure that he would have appreciated that a theatrical group dedicated to the works of the greatest writer in the English language (sorry, Bill) would choose a Saroyan "classic"

(as its publicity material proudly stated) as part of its 2007 season. Indeed, the 45-year-old company indicates that it is "dedicated to Shakespeare's canon and other world classics," and, elsewhere says that "the event is part of the American Masterpiece Series in New Jersey." Praise indeed!

The 21-character cast included three Armenians. They were: Gregory Derelian, in the key role of the bartender/owner of Nick's Pacific Street Saloon, where the action is centered; Paul Meshejian, as the "no foundation" Arab, and who will be directing *Last of the Boys* for the Inter-Active Theatre in Philadelphia, later this month; and John Nahigian in two roles, McCarthy the longshoreman and as the sailor.

With next year being Saroyan's centenary year, it is hoped that more theatrical groups – large and small, professional and amateur

theater

– would delve into the large chest of works and pick out some of the others.

As the New Jersey group’s production showed so well, Saroyan’s was, indeed, a different world. But, look around and put hand on heart and say that today’s is a better world.

It was a world of Saroyan’s favorite “common” people – those with hope and optimism – a pair of items missing today. Who else but Saroyan would have written that passionate message, beginning “In the time of your life, live...” and ending “so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite delight and mystery of it.”?

Still many, many years ago (My, I really am straining the memory cells), when I checked into the Tudor Hotel (at the time, my favorite hotel in New York), the Front Desk said to the bellman, “Take Mr. Kevorkian to room 1220.” The bellman picked up my bag and directed me to the rear elevators and said, “Kevorkian. That’s an Ar-

“Read William Saroyan’s stories,” the Scots bellman said, “and you will learn all you need to know about America.”

menian name, isn’t it?” I said that it was and said (as I did in those days, since recognizing Armenian names was not that common), “I am surprised you recognize it as such.” He then asked, “Do you know William Saroyan?”

At that time, I had not met Bill, but I was surprised to be asked such a question, and said so. He replied, “He’s the greatest writer in the country.” I told him that Saroyan would agree, and asked why he believed it.

His reply explains why Bill’s novels, plays, and stories are so great. He said that when he came to America from Scotland [in the early 1930s], he decided that he wanted to stay and become an American citizen, and he was told, “Read William Saroyan’s

stories, and you will learn all you need to know about America.” He then said, “I did. I’ve read everything that he has written.” We had reached my room when he added. “And when I married and had a son, I named him after William Saroyan.” To this day, I often wonder how many Armenians have named their sons after William Saroyan.

But, enough of the wanderings down memory lane (how is that for a cliché?).

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey should be commended for the very fine production, and it should be supported. They perform at the E. M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, 36 Madison avenue (Route 124) at Lancaster road) on the Drew University campus, in the lovely college town of Madison.

Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, is currently playing, and the year will end on a seasonal note with *A Christmas Carol*. ❧

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Father-and-daughter CD – *Our Favorites*

The release of the versatile musical compilation, *Our Favorites*, perpetuates the musical talent and tradition of the Nalbandian family. Rev. Fr. Untzag Nalbandian, pastor of the Armenian Church of the Holy Ascension in Trumbull, Conn., and his youngest daughter, Ani Nalbandian, a junior at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., have released their first CD together, consisting of Armenian, as well as international songs.

While it is the first CD for Ani, Fr. Untzag is no stranger to CD recording and production. This numbers his third, preceded by two previous CDs recorded and produced on the occasions of his 20th and 25th anniversaries of or-

dination to the priesthood. This CD, however, is simply the realization of Fr. Untzag’s and Ani’s wish to celebrate and share their passion for music with others.

This CD owes its distinction to this father and daughter duo’s extraordinary talent not only in singing and playing the piano, but the accordion and *srink*. The selection of songs encompasses classic traditional and modern Armenian and international songs. The result of a summer’s toils at home, *Our Favorites* is bound to bring joy and raise a light-hearted spirit in all who listen. ❧

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Ani Nalbandian on the CD cover.

The late Marcos Grigorian shown at the hall housing his paintings, Earthworks, installations, and extensive collection of regional cultural artifacts. Photos: Hovik Malians.



Marcos Grigorian: Back to the earth

by Gregory Lima

YEREVAN – Circle back on Nalbandian Street to the rear of the huge National Galleries and at a modest door a few steps on is the placard of the Near East Museum. You'll find it one flight up and to the right. There you'll enter to the perfunctory photograph and to the celebratory data that is the necessary vestibule here of honored artists, and now, opening your eyes just that bit wider, you begin your travel in the quirky world of Marcos Grigorian.

Marcos was born in 1925 in Russia, his parents Western Armenian survivors of the Genocide who then again moved on, this time to Iran, where he grew up to manhood, created his first significant

work, and had his major initial influence.

He was to become one of that brilliant band of international Armenians of the 20th century who brought fresh invention to ancient pursuits, embraced the languages and tested the concepts of other cultures to more clearly define and reinvent their own, and bring brought resonant original expression to the concept of being an Armenian in the modern world.

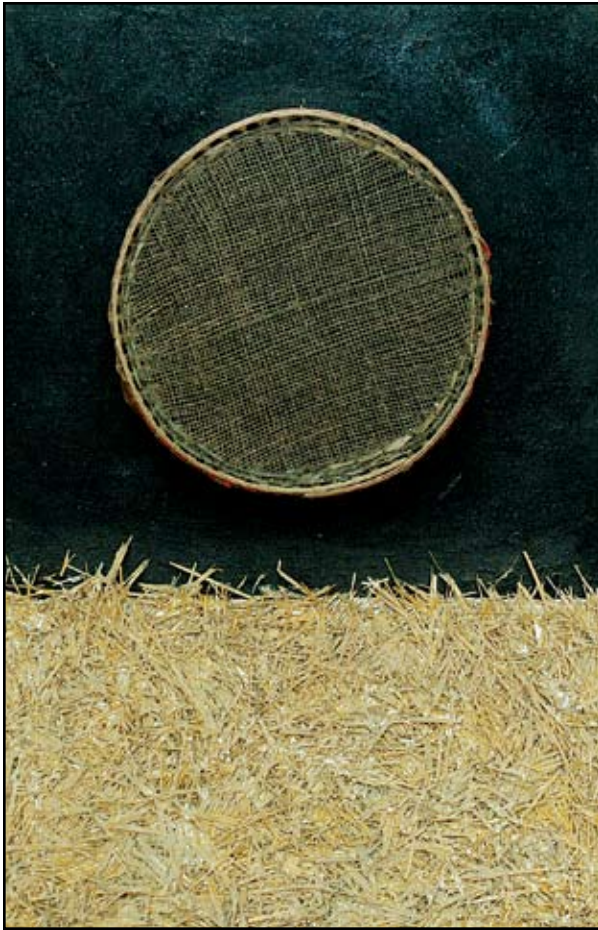
Marcos Grigorian is credited as being a driving force and a father of the modern Iranian art movement, of which he was initially an integral part. He was to have an influence as a teacher and friend on the formation of other Iranian and Armenian artists who rose to international prominence. His

The Marcos and Sabrina Grigorian Collection
The Near East Museum
Yerevan

own work is installed in major collections and he has the special distinction of being included in the permanent collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art along with Arshile Gorky and the other towering figures in 20th century art.

I knew him personally in Iran as a young artist and years later again in New York at his Gorky Gallery in the Madison Avenue building on trendy art gallery row he purchased following his success. In 1992, disconsolate upon the death of his beautiful and beloved

art



An Earthworks collage of earth, straw, and a worn soil sifter. The artisan tool creates a context that adds an additional dimension of laborious human effort in a bleak landscape.

daughter Sabrina, he packed up, disposed of his chic art gallery, and came to Armenia, the home of his dreams and his heart.

Armenia had just declared its independence from the Soviet Union and had entered the extraordinarily difficult period of drastic social adjustments, contentious relations with neighbors, armed conflict, and the ongoing blockade of its east and west borders, while it tried to reorient and build a sustainable market economy. It was at this time he donated this collection in the name of his daughter to Armenia. Seeking a place to house it, the economically hard-pressed government in 1993 found space in the Art and Literature wing of the Armenian National Galleries, where it has since remained pending other outcomes.

After all these years it still looks like the temporary exhibition of two museums in a large closet.

Earthworks

In my judgment the visible Marcos Grigorian legacy is his Earthworks. They may be understood as part of the Abstract Impressionist movement to which Arshile Gorky gave birth. But I relate them to his grappling with the theme of the Armenian Genocide and the issues related to the question: To whom does the crust of our earth belong and what promise of home can we make to the newborn?

His Earthworks occurred when he put down his brushes and canvases and no longer painted. He went back to the earth, plunged in his hands, clasped them as claws in the mud, and pulled out in his touch intimations of his own mortality but the ultimate immortality of mankind.

His Earthworks gain resonance when seen in the context of their complementarities with, and perhaps their influence on, the conceptual thinking of specific other artists. The actual subjects may seem far removed, but the same elemental approach has resulted in works that, in my judgment, are related and of astounding beauty. One such artist is Parviz Tanovoli and his sculptures of a nightingale emerging from a cage and its cry into the void – the *heech*, the vast nothingness that holds the shadow of God. Another is Sirak Melconian, who looks beneath the skin of the earth to the tensions in the tectonic plates, and we can feel in our own belly the unseen knots of grinding care and sometimes the fragile equilibriums in our swollen hearts. This is the company where his work ultimately belongs and its significance is revealed.

The rest of the work, with few exceptions, is like a large orchestra tuning up for the performance at a later hour.

Auschwitz

At the museum his work is shown as going through three phases. In the first he returns to Iran from studies in Europe, holding a diplo-

ma from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. This phase is covered by the first canvases in the collection, the young artist in color bursts of paint that establish his bona fides as a relatively conventional artist who can paint recognizable faces if he wants to. It is followed by a second phase, which flirts on the edge of the Picasso of the *Demoielles d'Avignon*.

This second phase culminates in a massive, signature work on Auschwitz. With international attention riveted on the Holocaust, he declares, "My cry has now become the world's cry," and he attempts to depict the horrors of the mass murder of innocents in paint.

It is a project of overarching ambition with dubious prospects from the start.

To paint an ultimate horror that will not drive you away in revulsion, that will instead draw you to the canvas, engage your mind, and have you come away with a sense of witness: that would be profoundly difficult. I would be in awe if it could be done in paint.

But to attempt to go further, which to my mind the theme of Genocide and Auschwitz demands, to create a shared experience in living time not as a mere happening but as a shattering convulsion in the body of humanity: that would be virtually impossible. Media other than canvas and paint may offer possibilities, but even then within the culture, and within the body politic, a profound feeling for the event to be depicted must already exist.

If events have not already moved you to outrage, a daub of paint will not.

However, if such a feeling already exists, very little is needed to create powerful responses. Here in Yerevan in the park at the corner of Terian and Moscovian, just off the pedestrian walk, there is an upright stone with some words inscribed. Into a split near the top of the single stone is a burnished brass object in the shape



Detail from *Auschwitz*, from one of the panels in Marcos Grigorian's vision of the Genocide within the Holocaust. He exclaimed "my cry" became "the world's cry" and composed a narrative painting that in its entirety, twelve 10-foot-long panels, completed with an Earthwork sculpture, extends beyond 120 feet in length. Two of the panels are on display in The Near East Museum.

Earthwork collage and installation. Marcos Grigorian in his earthwork sculpture might add a freestanding, labor-worn tool to his composition, a barrow, wood plough, or a rake that seems to have scratched the earth for generations.



of a flame. One sleepless night in distant thunder and light rain, I walked in the park and first came upon the monument. There was a spotlight on a further high pole giving a focused shaft of light on the brass object. The brass object seemed to flicker in high flame and into the pattern of the steady rain in that shaft of light an autumn leaf twisted and glowed for a moment in its fall to the ground. I was moved by this, and looking with wet eyes saw that on the ground were spread bouquets of cut flowers – like Martiros Sarian’s great, iconic homage to the dead of the Great War that hangs in the National Galleries, and I stood in silent awe. This small stone split at the top into two parts at this small spot had been made sacred in commemoration of both the Genocide and the Holocaust. Words were not needed to feel and know this truth.

Grigorian, however, had larger ambitions. To create his own vision of the murder of innocents at Auschwitz, Marcos Grigorian turned, I believe, to a most unlikely source: paintings of the martyrdom of Hussein in the popular culture of Persia – part of the mournful story of Ashura, whose recitation was capable of bringing tears of compassion and floods of sorrow to millions of Shia Muslims.



Talismans against the Evil Eye. These are embroidered sun disks with female faces, called Sun Ladies. They suggest a Zoroastrian or even earlier origin, calling upon the powers of the goddess Anahita to protect the children in the family. The Grigorian Collection contains especially fine examples. It is a cultural tradition that deserves additional study.

Reza Shah had banned the self-flagellation of the Ashura processions in Iran, as later would Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The self-flagellation created a sense of an oppressed community profoundly united in shared pain. In what was then a severely constricted tradition, Marcos had salvaged what remaining paintings he could find and commissioned new traditional artwork by what he called the Teahouse Troubadours, the itinerant storytellers who went from teahouse to teahouse in their singing voices carrying a painted scene of the tragedy at Karbala that would illustrate the major elements of the martyrdom as it unfolded.

If the Ashura paintings would provide Marcos with an inspired starting point, he could also find ample evidence of similarities in the Christian tradition, notably the ritual processions of penitents down the Via Dolorosa. Nor is there any lack of deeply moving Jewish folkloristic art on the theme of the suffering and sorrow of a persecuted people set apart. But wherever he might find antecedents, unavoidable would be comparison to the most successful painting ever done of a large-scale human tragedy in the 20th century: Picasso’s 1937 masterwork, *Guernica*, painted in the heat of the moment. It succeeded in no small part because the painting talked to sentiments already mo-

bilized and orchestrated.

Picasso used a huge canvas, more than 10 feet high and more than 26 feet long, giving a visceral immediacy and the urgency of a black-and-white news sheet to the aerial bombing of a defenseless city and the deliberate killing of men, women, and children that was to later become a too-familiar tactic of modern, total war. *Guernica* was the capital of the short-lived Basque Republic in the Spanish Civil War, razed by Hitler’s aircraft as a gesture of friendship at the request of the fascist Franco regime.

Auschwitz touches human catastrophe in a way that is vastly more intimate, troubling, and on the greatest scale the world had ever known. Moreover, while *Auschwitz* belongs to all of us, whatever the pressing reasons Grigorian would do this at that time, they are his own. Picasso painted on one huge panel. Marcos Grigorian needs more space: he needs at least a dozen huge panels to tell a narrative with a beginning and an end. He took Picasso’s 10-foot-high canvas and in smaller segments, laid them on their sides, so that each of 12 panels is 6 feet high and 10 feet long. His finished work, completed in 1959, is more than 120 feet in length.

The sad fact is that this museum contains only two of the panels of *The Gate of Auschwitz*, a fraction of the entire work. It has neither

the start with the sensuous flesh of the women and infants, nor the transcendence of the ending. In short it lacks the narrative elements that define the work.

Zara Makatsian, the curator and truly knowledgeable manager of the museum, stated that Marcos Grigorian was planning to have a special showing of the entire work this year and was making plans on how they could find the necessary space for it. That would have been an event, for it would have brought back the last and defining section of the painting: the rebirth, the redemption.

To achieve his concept of the rebirth, Marcos took to heart the solemn words “earth to earth, ashes to ashes,” and in one of the most powerful of his Earthworks, using earth and ashes, he created his paean to death and resurrection, an earthwork sculpture depicting an eternal earth that even in days of sorrow and mourning is heavily pregnant with new birth, and with it revived hope. It is the 13th panel, and it is left to the viewer to come away with his or her own message.

The best of Grigorian’s Earthworks, and there are several major pieces in this museum, speak to me in Biblical terms. Here is the earth upon the Fall of Man. It is barren and parched. To recreate the Garden seems almost hopeless. Yet, there is no other choice but unforgiven death. It is an earth that may bear the fruits of the garden, but only by husbandry and unremitting labor irrigated by sweat and tears. Even then, life on this earth is a precious miracle.

Add to the Earthworks the introduction of found objects and collage, and they take on additional dimensions. A soil sifter adds a felicitous circle to one sculpture, as does a labor-worn plough to another.

Of the Earthworks on display, among the most significant is the one Grigorian proposed as the eternal symbol of Armenia. It has



Marcos Grigorian’s iconic symbol of Armenia. Like Christendom’s medieval maps where the earth can be depicted as a circle in a rectangle within which the cross marks the regions, he creates an Earthwork that is even more elemental. It may be seen as the earth earned by the tragedy of all life lived and by unremitting labor where survival is not assured but a kind of miracle in recognition of which we must work even harder to nourish and sustain the future of our offspring.

a resemblance to the ancient, medieval maps where the earth is a flat circle in a rectangle, and within this circle is the cross. It also has that quality of the pristine earth ripped out of the Garden after the Fall where Man again and again in difficult and unremitting labor must start over, hoping this time he will do it right.

Is there a better eternal symbol of Armenia?

Sun Ladies

The rest of the exhibition includes his carpets as wall hangings, and a live weaver at work on the last of his designs.

Then follows his collection of dis-

parate items that are in the realm of precious personal belongings.

This forms the promising beginnings of a museum that has cohesion as the designated Near East Museum only because it is part of same personal collection, but otherwise runs from ancient arrowheads to quaint Singer sewing machines straight from the factory 100 years ago that grandma used when wedding dresses were sewn at home. In this space you may find some remarkable items but they will have only the tenuous relationship to the work in the other room that you may find at Yerevan’s Parajanov Museum, where personal belongings suggest the



Prehistoric pottery from one of the numerous mounds of archaeological interest to be found in the Armenian-Iranian region of the Near East. In Iran there was once a lively trade in such items by illiterate illegal diggers who attacked such sites before archaeologists could properly document and identify the origin and study the culture of the ancient people who fashioned and used them. Such items, usually cracked under the pressures of the millennia, were often sold on the roadside to be purchased sight unseen in burlap sacks. Usually, in one of the sacks there was a great piece, but you had to buy them all or be lucky. Either way, Marcos was lucky, but archaeology was not.

particular creative world of this specific artist.

Among the major items he treasured from Iran is an extensive, fascinating collection of Zoroastrian talismans against the Evil Eye. These are representations of God in the sun, a benign female face embroidered in a circle of cloth. They are known as Sun Ladies and suggest an even older provenance, calling upon the powers of the goddess Anahita. These are found again embroidered on the beautiful bridal cloth that wraps the bride's possessions when she will leave her parents.

There is a rich collection of artisan wares, beautiful examples of old door-knockers, water faucets from the glory days of Islamic arts and crafts, intricate old door-latches with inspired keys and locks. Add to this a collection of Turcoman silver ornaments and some of the ancient Luristan bronzes whose collection was all the rage some years ago in Iran, along with some unusually well

preserved samples of the extraordinary earthenware pots the illegal diggers used to sell hidden in burlap sacks and classified under the generic title Sush – hardly that location or time period – meaning only from the dawning age of civilization.

Together this part of the extensive collection carries the conceit of The Near East Museum. It seems that Marcos wanted to attract other donors with like items to create a broader more inclusive regional display, but very little was forthcoming. Without a doubt, should a serious effort be made, there is a vast current potential in Armenia, as elsewhere in the region, to augment such a collection. With so much of what is old and beautiful being thrown into the dustheap, some fragments may be saved now rather than waiting for chance and rediscovery as treasures at some later age.

Marcos Grigorian recently died without a will, leaving the final disposition of his estate with seri-

ous questions. The simplest outcome for the Marcos Grigorian Collection is to take down the Near East Museum placard, cut a door into the main Armenian National Galleries from which you would enter, and call it what it is, The Marcos and Sabrina Grigorian Collection. That is his gift to Armenia and clearly what he wanted. Other desirable outcomes must call upon groups of concerned friends who might create a special environment that would bring out the qualities of his full work in a stimulating context, housed in a place of his own. That is the superior solution he also clearly expressed, and what he very much wanted.

When you die without a will – even though you have been preoccupied with man's legacy almost all your creative life – your legacy may become little more than some whistling in the wind. Armenia is his designated heir to his art, and we can do better than has so far been done. ❧

Karen Kondazian: Leading lady inspires and transforms

In the role of life, she is independent, full of spirit, and ready to sacrifice

by Shahan Sanossian

HOLLYWOOD - Karen Kondazian is probably best known for her masterful depictions of Tennessee Williams' leading ladies, but she has also acted in films and television, produced plays, taught her craft, and written extensively. In fact, her book, *The Actor's Encyclopedia of Casting Directors*, comprised of interviews with top casting directors, became a best-seller and is considered required reading for actors just beginning their careers.

When we meet on a sunny day in the lobby of her Hollywood condominium, she is eager to tell me about *The Whip*, a novel she has recently written about a woman in the old West who lived her life as a man. Kondazian is not what I expected; knowing her stature in Los Angeles theater, knowing she studied with the great Lee Strasberg, and knowing that she won an Ovation Award for her significant portrayal of the opera diva Maria Callas, I must admit I expected someone more aloof, more like the diva that her heady career might suggest. She is warm, wide open, and emotionally engaging in the deep, look-you-in-the-eyes way of an actor who is intimately self-aware and utterly self-confident.

The Whip is the story of Charley Parkhurst, one of the West Coast's



Kondazian as Maria Callas in *Master Class*. Photo: Ed Krieger.

finest stagecoach drivers; she once killed an infamous bandit. Parkhurst lived her entire adult life as a man, possibly becoming the first woman ever to vote in the United States. She was only outed as a woman after her death.

"A woman could be three things in the old West," Kondazian tells me, "a mother or wife, a prostitute, or a teacher – and maybe run a boardinghouse. That was it. Those were your choices. But there were a lot of women who lived their lives as men. They were not famous, so they lived and died and nobody knew about it. It wasn't about sexuality; it was about living their lives in a free-spirited way, as men were able to do."

Kondazian's work as an actor

is once again receiving attention. She plays Sally Goforth in the current Fountain Theatre production of Tennessee Williams' *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, running through November 4 in Los Angeles. The play is about Goforth, a wealthy, aged former Follies girl who is living in Italy and writing her memoir when a young man named Christopher Flanders trespasses on her estate. Their chance meeting, in the end, brings Goforth some measure of peace before her death. The play is rarely produced and is not considered among Williams' best work. In fact, it closed on Broadway in 1964 after only five performances. The film version starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton didn't fare much better. But the critics have almost unanimously praised this latest production.

"It was a four-and-a-half hour play," Kondazian tells me. "Our brilliant director Simon Levy, who's a great dramaturge, has cut it down to two hours so that a lot of the extra bushes are trimmed."

The Angel of Death

"It's an important piece," Kondazian says, "but it's flawed because [Williams] wrote it on drugs: he was very, very stoned when he wrote this play. So a lot of it is very subterranean – not for the audience so much but for the actor, for the director – why people do things in the play."

"You know, with Williams, his flawed plays are better than most writers' best pieces. The man was a poet. Each play is a poem in a sense." Kondazian tells me that *Milk Train* was written after



Kondazian and Michael Rodgers perform the lead roles in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*.

Photos: Ed Krieger.

Williams' lover Frank Merlo died of cancer. Williams had mistreated Merlo, having love affairs with other men while Merlo was dying in the next room. "Williams didn't go to the hospital; he was scared of hospitals. He wasn't there when Merlo passed away. So he wrote this play as a kind of exorcism, as a poem of pain and remorse, finally letting his heart open about what he had done to this man."

The play explores the way in which one dies. "You watch the life force disappear from this realm," Kondazian says. Sally Go-forth "actually dies on stage. And it's extraordinary the way Simon Levy has done it. She wears rings – she always wears very beautiful rings – and as the angel of death

takes off each ring, it's a breath that's gone from her. He's standing there holding her hand and being with her." The message of the play, according to Kondazian, is that we must not be afraid to engage with death. "It's so beautiful because it's about finally accepting death. A lot of people who have come to the play have held the hand of somebody as they passed on, and they're so moved by Williams' and Simon Levy's expression of what death can be. We experience life, but we are so afraid of experiencing death. This play shows how important it is for both the person who is there and the person who is passing away."

"I was so grateful to be with my mother as she passed away," Kondazian confides. "When she took her last breath, I followed her eyes, which were still open. She was looking at a photograph of her mother."

Fresno roots

Kondazian's mother, Lillian Paul, grew up in Fresno during the oft-forgotten time when Armenians were heavily discriminated against and even barred from entering certain hotels and restaurants. "My momma wanted to be an actress in Fresno, but because she was an Armenian, she was not cast in any plays. That's another reason why she encouraged me."

"No Armenians or dogs allowed," Kondazian says as if looking at the horrible sign displayed in front of her. "I think young people don't know [about that era]. I think through art we can make people aware of the past, so it never happens again."

Kondazian's stepfather, Varnum Paul, has also been – and continues to be – an inspiration. "He just had his 99th birthday. He's a fine lawyer. He is now, as we speak, in his office. He goes five days a week." *The San Francisco Chronicle* wanted to write a profile on Paul, but he wouldn't agree to it. Kondazian tells me his humility stood

in the way. "Like a lot of Armenians, he said, 'Other people will think I'm special.' And I said, 'But you are special. I want people to be inspired by you, that at the age of 99 going on 100, you're still working and you still have a passion in life to help other people.'"

The Varnum and Lillian Paul Screenwriting Award was made possible by a donation from Paul to the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church. Kondazian helped facilitate this award, given by the Armenian Dramatic Arts Alliance (ADAA), in large part because of the respect and gratitude she feels for her parents. And she credits Archbishop Hovnan Derderian for his support of the project. "He is such a great man, such a great human being. I think that if he wasn't an archbishop, he would be an artist because he has that incredible sensitivity and nature."

The first award was recently given to Richard Kalinoski for his play *The Crooked Man*, which is about a genocide survivor and his grandson. The ADAA has now teamed up with Stanford University to give its Saroyan Award to playwrights; the Paul Award will be given to screenwriters and will alternate every other year with the Saroyan. The Paul Award is open to any writer, regardless of ethnicity, as long as his or her subject is Armenian in nature. "I wanted other nationalities to go, 'Oh this \$10,000 award, let me do some research about who these Armenians are.' And by doing that, they'll write a piece that, even if they don't win the contest, will go out there. Maybe they'll want to produce it somewhere. So that it'll start like a little amoeba, developing until we have a lot of projects out there about the Armenian people."

Kondazian's big break came after an accident in her late 20s left her in a coma. She took charge of her career and produced Williams' *The Rose Tattoo* with her own money – money made as a dialogue

coach for Herve Villechaize on the television series *Fantasy Island*. “I was the one who taught him, ‘The plane! The plane!’” Kondazian tells me. “I took this money, and I produced *The Rose Tattoo*. I didn’t know anything about producing. I didn’t even know you were supposed to get the rights for the play. I knew nothing! Finally I learned, and thank God the rights were available.

“You know how once in a while you make a choice to do something and then everything aligns itself to help you. The woman who I hired to help me produce – her father had directed the play on Broadway, and the movie version. I didn’t even know until the play was half over. She never told me. So she knew everything about *The Rose Tattoo*. I mean, the people who became involved in it! It was so amazing.”

The lady with the cleavage

Kondazian won the Best Actress award from the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle for the role. But perhaps the most wonderful result of the production was the friendship she built with Tennessee Williams. Before he saw the production, Williams was honored at a luncheon hosted by the Drama Critics Circle to which Kondazian had also been invited.

“Now, we know that Williams was gay,” she says. “And there I am sitting across from him at this table, and I had all this cleavage. I don’t know why I wore all this cleavage, but I did. Everybody’s talking to him, and he’s sort of half talking to them, but most of the time he’s staring at my cleavage. Then somebody comes over and says, ‘I want to take you over to Mr. Williams and introduce you.’ And so I go over there, and he says, ‘Oh! the lady with the cleavage! Oh! I like that cleavage.’ And I mean, I know that he’s gay, and why is he doing this? He’s carrying on like a straight guy might.

“All of a sudden, he says, ‘I just



love your breasts. Can I touch them?’ And I go, ‘Sure!’ So he puts his hands on my breasts and says, ‘Oh darling! I’ll take those gift wrapped!’ And he starts laughing. Everybody’s looking: what’s Tennessee Williams doing with his hands on Karen Kondazian’s breasts! That’s how it began. With my breasts.”

When asked why she thinks Williams took such a liking to her, Kondazian says, “In my youth, he thought I was very much like one of his favorite women, Anna Magnani, the great Italian film actress. He in fact told me that I looked like her when we first met. I think somehow he got me. I got him.”

Kondazian’s friend Paul Ryan, an actor and a talk-show host, had asked her what she wanted for her birthday. “I jokingly said, ‘Tennessee to come see *The Rose Tattoo*.’ He actually arranged it as a birthday present.” But Kondazian was very anxious the night Williams would see the play, not only because he was an idol of hers and not only because dozens of celebrities were going to see the show that evening. “They didn’t come to see me; they came to see Tennessee.” She was nervous because her production had cut the first

forty minutes of the play without permission.

Would Williams be offended and walk out? That didn’t happen. In fact, Williams declared Kondazian’s *The Rose Tattoo* the best production of his play that he’d ever seen, and he described her portrayal of the lead Serafina della Rosa as “staggeringly beautiful.” Williams gladly offered her the rights to produce any of his plays in Los Angeles.

After *The Rose Tattoo*, Kondazian went on the play more of Williams’ strong female leads, including the lead in *Sweet Bird of Youth* opposite Ed Harris. “This young actor comes in,” Kondazian says. “Knocks us out with one of the greatest auditions I’ve ever seen in my life. It was Ed Harris, just beginning his work. He was breathtaking and brilliant.”

Kondazian worked with Simon Levy on *Orpheus Descending* and *Night of the Iguana*. She has also appeared in numerous television shows, including *NYPD Blue*, *Frazier*, *Ellen*, and *Hill Street Blues*. She was a series regular in *Shannon* and appeared with Luciano Pavarotti in *Yes, Giorgio*.

She and Pavarotti became fast friends when he began to use her

Kondazian and Michael Rodgers share a moment on stage.



Kondazian on stage with Dominic Acosta, Lauren Silvi, and Lisa Pelikan. Photos: Ed Krieger.

to foil his secretary's attempts to keep him from overeating. "Poor thing," Kondazian tells me. "They always had people around to watch him so he wouldn't eat. So one day, he and I have a little scene. There's all this food. In movie sets, unlike theater, it's real food that you can eat. I saw him; his eyes were focused on this food. Finally he grabbed me and used me as a shield from the trailer where his secretary was lurking. He was moving me along, and behind me he would be grabbing food and stuffing food into his mouth, gobbling! Then he'd push me to the next dish and do the same thing. All of a sudden the secretary saw us. She came out screaming in Italian. She was screaming at me like it was my fault. He thought it was so funny. So from that moment on we became great pals. He kissed my hand a lot, but he never made a pass. So sweet and generous, and I'm so sorry he's gone. That beautiful voice."

Channeling Maria Callas

Many people now recognize Kondazian as the actor who played Maria Callas in *The Fountain*

Theatre's production of *Terrence McNally's Master Class*, directed again by Simon Levy. The play about the real-life opera star centers around a class Callas taught at the Juilliard School.

Kondazian did hundreds of hours of preparation for the part, watching DVDs of Callas and listening to her CDs and to recordings of the actual Juilliard class. She was also lucky to correspond with one of Callas's students, allowing her to gain insight into who the woman was. "I even found out what color lipstick she wore to class," Kondazian says. The former student "would have privates with her; [Callas] was having trouble with her teeth; she was going blind; she was having all kinds of trouble that nobody knew about.

"There were times, I must tell you, it was scary. It was like I was channeling [Callas]. Ultimately, all artists are channelers; we're an instrument. You do the research, you do the work, but ultimately you have to let go and channel God. God does the work. And when I say God, it can be whatever word you choose. Some people don't believe in God; so you say the creative force, but it's definitely something

larger than ourselves."

"I believe that the bigger a human being is," Kondazian tells me, "meaning a diva or a CEO, screaming and yelling all the time, I think those are the people who have the most wounded child who lives inside of them. And we Armenians, oh my God, we've inherited the ultimate wounded child from the Genocide. So as an artist, one needs to always reveal that in one's work. That's who we all are," and that's who the audience will recognize and react to.

"That's what happened in *Master Class*. There was a man who came eleven times, I know for sure. He was in a wheelchair, a young man, and I asked him finally 'Why do you come so many times?' He said, 'Because this play gives me permission to feel.' He would weep so much.

"The play is about a woman, but it was always the men who were weeping. You see Onassis in it, who left Callas and treated her very badly. I think men see for the first time how sometimes they have treated women badly, the pain that they have caused. It was so amazing to see how men were affected by this play. What I did with Callas was to find that wounded child. She was very wounded."

"What will the neighbors think?"

Master Class concludes with a monologue about the sacrifices one must make for the sake of art. I ask Kondazian what sacrifices she has had to make. "Oh my God, yes. The sacrifice, I guess most of all is that I've never married. I've been engaged several times to wonderful men, one of whom died while I was engaged to him. When I was in London, I used to date King Hussein. I've had wonderful, interesting men in my life. I've always loved to learn from men. I hope to find a man who's willing to put up with a free spirit,

who loves to be independent himself. I think it was Rilke who said a man and a woman should come together, border and protect each other but not intrude. It shouldn't be islands that become one. You need to be separate islands, and that's what I'm looking for.

"But the sacrifice is that my work has been all encompassing. As an Armenian woman, you know, that's a very strange plight. Broke my mother's heart – I'm an only child. I was so lucky before she passed away, she said, 'I understand. I know what it is you're doing. And it's okay that you never married, never had children.'

"I never wanted to be a momma. My students are my children. I've had so many children, being a teacher and mentor."

Karen Kondazian has so many hopes and plans for the future. She wants to support Armenian theater and film, and she is working once again with Simon Levy on another project.

Levy is adapting Tennessee Williams' novella *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* for the stage. The Williams estate has the reputation of fiercely guarding the playwright's work, but they have been so impressed with the Kondazian-Levy partnership and with Levy's adaptations of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels for the stage that they granted Levy the rights.

Kondazian has also recently taken part in the feature film *Blue Hour* by writer-director Eric Nazarian. The movie premiered this September at the Donostia-San Sebastian International Film Festival.

Kondazian took a very small role as the mother of Allegra (Alyssa Milano) because she admires Nazarian "as a director, writer, and human being." Cast by the veteran Armenian-American casting director Valerie McCaffrey, the film is set along the banks of the somewhat unsavory and often ignored Los Angeles River. The stories of a Mexican graffiti art-

ist, an Armenian camera repairer, a blues guitarist, and an English pensioner are woven together to reveal the tenuous ties that bind strangers in the city.

"I have been thinking about being an Armenian and why we don't have more artists," Kondazian tells me. "We Armenians, we're the most extraordinary people, but one of the things we are taught, particularly the girls and women, is always be careful what you say, be careful of what other people think. What will the neighbors think? I don't know about now, but I bet there are still remnants of that. And as a result, there are not a lot of artists or rebels. Armenians, when we're rebellious, my God!

"There are the William Saroyans and Khachaturians, the great painters and writers, the Atom Egoyans. We're fierce if anyone takes our land, but were a gentle people."

"It seems that our safety, our security as a race, has always been money, land, and position, particularly the men." So children are perhaps not encouraged to seek professions in the arts as much as they could be. "Younger Armenians can encourage their children or brothers and sisters to find their hearts when it comes to art – because art is one of the few ways that people are going to know about us as a people." Kondazian wants very much to "show the world the beauty of our people."

It is unfortunate that my interview with Kondazian has to end. As a writer myself, I feel an affinity for the life that she leads. And I've come to understand why her novel, *The Whip*, is so important to her. She has lived a life of independence and spirit when such behavior wasn't necessarily supported by her community. "When I grew up, I wanted to be an actress at eight years old. I thought there was something wrong with me. I'm so grateful that I had a stubbornness in me that just



wanted to write and act. I've been very fortunate."

And she continues to live her life on her own terms. But perhaps that "wounded child," that eight-year-old who thought there was something wrong with her, still lives inside of Kondazian. Perhaps it is one of the reasons she is trying to build support for the arts in Armenian society.

"Everything that I do," she says, "I do to inspire and transform. I don't mean that in an egotistical way." She simply wants to share what she has learned and experienced, so that she "can encourage someone else to follow their bliss, to follow their heart, because heart is all that matters." ■■■

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Kondazian with Lisa Pelikan, the efficient secretary Blackie who must react to the ever-increasing strangeness that surrounds her.

Stars to celebrate 10th anniversary of the Arpa International Film Festival

AFFMA cultivating the arts of film writing, directing, and acting

by Adrineh Gregorian

HOLLYWOOD – The Arpa International Film Festival will be celebrating its 10th anniversary from Friday, November 2 to Sunday, November 4 at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood.

Founded by the Arpa Foundation for Film, Music and Art (AFFMA), the festival seeks to promote the arts and enhance the cultural environment of the Armenian community, especially providing support to filmmakers exploring subjects of social and cultural importance.

AFFMA is a nonprofit umbrella organization that sponsors artistic events in Los Angeles. For the past twelve years they have initiated an annual grant program, lectures, panel discussions, exclusive film screenings, art exhibits, fashion shows, theater outings, and concerts. This year marks a milestone for AFFMA: the 10th anniversary of the Arpa International Film Festival. While most film festivals only last seven years, Arpa is consistently growing stronger.

Since 1997, the Arpa International Film Festival has been “dedicated to cultivating cultural understanding and global empathy, aiming to create a dynamic forum for international cinema



The honorees, director Atom Egoyan and his wife actress/producer Arsinée Khanjian flanked by fans.

with a special focus on the work of filmmakers who explore the issues of diaspora, exile, and multiculturalism,” says AFFMA founder and chairperson Sylvia Minasian. “The festival also celebrates the ideals of independent thought, artistic vision, cultural diversity, and social understanding.”

Minassian champions young people’s pursuit of filmmaking and the arts. It was Minassian’s passion that led her to create and continue to support this festival. Without her enthusiasm, Armenian and international filmmakers would be without a Los Angeles-based festival that explores our common history.

Minassian wants the Armenian community to take notice of the youth who have chosen to go into show business as opposed to law, medicine, or dentistry. Zaven Khachatourian, the film festival curator, happens to be a dentist who’s passionate about film. His dental practice supports his love of supporting filmmakers. He has often said, had there been an AFFMA when he was a young man, he could have been supported to become a working filmmaker, since film is his first love. That’s why he works so hard to support AFFMA today. Maybe in the past Armenians weren’t encouraged to go into the arts by their parents,

film festival



The first AFFMA organization photo.

but with the support of an art organization and film festival like AFFMA, young artists feel like they can show and share their talent. The Arpa Film Festival gives filmmakers not only of Armenian heritage, but from all cultures, the chance to show, share, and exchange stories through film.

History of the festival

On April 27, 1997, the first annual film festival was held in the Alfred Hitchcock Theatre at Universal Studios in Universal City. Only twelve films were submitted, all made by Armenian filmmakers and mostly about Armenian subjects. Although two films were entered from Armenia and another two from Canada, the festival wasn't considered international yet.

The maiden voyage wasn't a competition film festival; it was just the opportunity to showcase work by Armenian talent. A very determined group of AFFMA volunteers searched long and hard for Armenian themed films and also gave grants to emerging filmmakers.

For the first time, the Armenian community in Los Angeles had a platform to honor members of the film community who have used

their success to raise the collective consciousness of film viewers. Honorary guests included producers Hank Moonjean (*The Great Gatsby*, *Dangerous Liaisons*) and Howard Kazanjian (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Rookie*) and screenwriter Paul Peterson. Among the enthusiastic participants were Harut Sassounian, the executive director of the United Armenian Fund; producer, artist and writer Vahé Berberian; filmmakers Vahe Babaian, Ruben Kochar, Ara Madzounian, Shahan Minassian, and Narbeh Nazarian; actor and producer Vache Mangassarian; and actor Shant Bejanian, among others.

Over the years honorees have included producer Arthur Sarkisian (*Rush Hour*), Atom Egoyan, Arsinée Khanjian, producer Robert Papazian (*Coffy*), Jim Hirsch, and Dr. Michael Hagopian.

What started as a small festival has evolved into a flourishing mainstay. The number of Armenian filmmakers has grown. "It's a major shift from ten years ago when few Armenian filmmakers were active. Also, Armenians are working more closely together to support each other as opposed to working in a bubble," says festival director Alex Kalognomos.

"Now, Armenian filmmakers from all over the world send us films and we encourage Armenian students at local Los Angeles film schools – USC, UCLA, Art Center, AFI, Cal Arts and the Cal States – to submit."

Continued support from the community and passionate efforts by the organizing committee has made Arpa the success it is today. The festival has progressively gained a larger audience. They went from Raleigh Studios (60-seat theaters) to Arclight Cinemas (200–300-seat theaters), and finally to the Egyptian Theater (600 seats) where they are now. This year Arpa will be screening an unprecedented 102 films.

Selection process

"The contribution of Armenians in shaping this country is now being embraced and recognized by filmmakers," says Kalognomos. "Arpa gets to bring these films together and screen them under one roof. It's also very exciting because over the years the films get stronger and stronger and the filmmakers get younger and younger with 16-year-old award-winning filmmakers sending us their work. Every year, there are more women directors, too."

Director/producer Edwin Avness with director Emy Hovanesyan (center), who was an AFFMA grant recipient in 2001 with writer Angela Zograbyan. Together they created the feature film *The Journey*.



Alex Kalognomos with 2006 AFFMA Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Dr. J. Michael Hagopian.



Starting in March of each year, Arpa's organizing committee receives a variety of entries. They include short films, films from video artists, experimental films, and long-form documentaries. Filmmakers can submit features, shorts, animations, music videos, and documentaries. Three examples of excellent documentaries that will be featured this year are ones on screenwriter Mardik Martin (*Mar-*

dik), legendary filmmaker Rouben Mamoulian (*Mamoulian*), and *The People's Advocate*, about Charles R. Garry, the Armenian-American lawyer of the Black Panthers.

Through the Internet, Arpa announces a call for entries and for 3 months they receive films from all over the world. As the films arrive, Khachatourian, the film festival curator, previews each of them. Then, the selection commit-

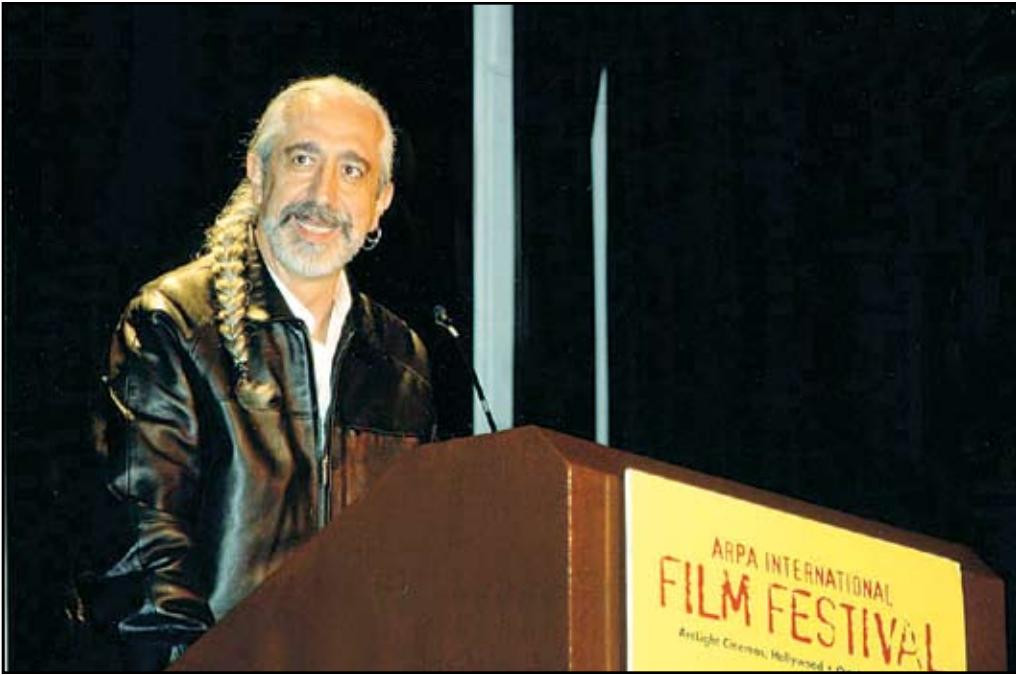
tee screens them and chooses the official selections.

Then entertainment industry professionals are invited to be on the jury, and winners are selected and announced at the gala awards banquet. Over the years, Arpa films have gone on to win Academy Awards. Just last year, the festival screened *The Little Matchgirl* and it went on to win an Oscar. Being in Los Angeles is a great advantage for Arpa. Kalognomos notes, "filmmakers compete for slots in our festival to win Academy recognition."

Arpa is different from other American-based Armenian film festivals in that it's open to non-Armenian films and filmmakers who explore issues such as diaspora, dual identity, war, exile, genocide, and culture.

Arpa aims to share these stories with other cultures and vice versa by accepting films from non-Armenians. An international film festival offers strong Armenian filmmakers the chance to compete with strong filmmakers from around the globe.

"We try to release the Armenian filmmakers from self-applauding ethnocentric audiences," says Khachatourian. Some people have



criticized AFFMA for its international scope. “I think of it like this,” says Kalognomos: “When a Cambodian filmmaker makes a strong genocide film, Armenians may want to see it. In fact, when a cross-cultural exchange such as that happens, a Cambodian can see a film about the Armenian Genocide and learn about our culture in turn. Arpa is about exchange, as opposed to remaining an insulated, Armenian-only film festival.”

More Armenians are learning about this festival every year and when Arpa schedules films correctly, audiences pack the theater.

The festival also acts as a resource to connect filmmakers with investors, advisors, and distributors. Armenians have settled in the entertainment capital of the world and more and more, AFFMA is helping the Armenian filmmaking community to take advantage of that.

Working for AFFMA has been very rewarding for Kalognomos. “It’s true, the festival is a never-ending commitment. Each of us on the 20-person committee could work 80 hours a week all year long, and the needs of filmmakers still wouldn’t be completely met,” he

said. “That’s the nature of working for a nonprofit. We’re all volunteers. As an actor and writer myself, the exposure I get to films is invaluable. I love to watch films. I love to discuss them with Zaven, our film curator. He knows volumes about western and eastern film and art. He supports filmmakers around the world, and he’s been my role model. Discussing film with him is enlightening.”

This year, AFFMA celebrates its 12th anniversary and will present the 10th Annual Arpa International Film Festival on November 2, 3, and 4, 2007, at the Egyptian Theater in the heart of Hollywood. Festival happenings include an opening night screening of Serj Tankian’s 12 new music videos, an opening night party, film screenings, industry panels, filmmaker discussions, and a closing night gala to be held at the Sheraton Universal Hotel.

“I salute the creative individuals and supporters alike whose participation and efforts have turned a once-upon-a-time dream into an artistically rewarding reality,” says Minassian. “I am proud to represent an organization whose sole purpose is to recognize the diverse tapestry of international

talent and present it to an appreciative public. Every great journey starts with a single step, just as every great work of art begins with a vision.”

Minassian goes on to say, “art is the enlightenment of all civilizations; consequently, we have no greater purpose than to make sure these splendid voices are heard, that these marvelous images are seen.”



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323-663-1882

Emmy winner Michael Goorjian, Oscar nominee Jose Rivera, Eric Bogosian, Arsinée Khanjian, Eric Nazarian, Garine Torrosian, Hayk Hambertsumyan, Carla Garapedian, Tony Petrossian, Diran Noubar, Roger Kupelian, Sevag Vrej, Ara Soudjian, Spencer Beglarian, Michelle Gevoian, Irina Patkanian, Edgar Metro, Serj Tankian, Caroline Sabah, Karen Kondazian, Gor, Vahe Berberian, and Vahram Hovakimyan are just some of the actors, directors, and musicians involved this year.

Above left: Distinguished intellectual, writer, director, performer, and artist Vahé Berberian.
Above: Tippi Hedren, mostly remembered for her performance in Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller *The Birds*.

22 October

MONDAY

EST	PST	Monday
4:30	7:30	Good Morning, Armenians!
5:30	8:30	What Went Wrong
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	Pan-Armenian Star
7:50	10:50	Cool Program
8:10	11:10	The Making of a Film
8:45	11:45	The Armenian Film
10:15	13:15	Exclusive
10:40	13:40	The Week
11:05	14:05	News in English
11:25	14:25	Cartoon
11:50	14:50	Teleduel
12:50	15:50	Yo-Yo
13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
13:50	16:50	News in Armenian
14:10	17:10	"Women in Love" (serial)
14:55	17:55	News in English
15:15	18:15	Music Videos
16:05	19:05	In Reality
16:30	19:30	"Belissima" (serial)
17:15	20:15	"Soul Mate" (serial)
18:00	21:00	Express
18:30	21:30	News in Armenian
18:50	21:50	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
19:20	22:20	Pan-Armenian Star
19:45	22:45	The Making of a Film
20:20	23:20	The Armenian Film
21:30	0:30	News in Armenian
21:55	0:55	Late at Night
22:55	1:55	What Went Wrong
23:20	2:20	Exclusive
23:40	2:40	Cartoon
0:05	3:05	Pan-Armenian Star
0:25	3:25	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
0:55	3:55	Yo-Yo
1:20	4:20	The Week
1:45	4:45	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Express
2:30	5:30	"Belissima" (serial)
3:15	6:15	"Women in Love" (serial)
4:00	7:00	In Reality

23 October

TUESDAY

EST	PST	Tuesday
4:30	7:30	Good Morning, Armenians!
5:30	8:30	What Went Wrong
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
7:05	10:05	PS Club
8:00	11:00	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
8:30	11:30	Pan-Armenian Star
8:50	11:50	Mosfilm
10:20	13:20	"Soul Mate" (serial)
11:05	14:05	News in English
11:25	14:25	Cartoon
11:45	14:45	Late at Night
12:45	15:45	Music Videos
13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
13:50	16:50	News in Armenian
14:10	17:10	"Women in Love" (serial)
14:55	17:55	News in English
15:15	18:15	"Suspects" (serial)
16:05	19:05	In Reality
16:30	19:30	"Belissima" (serial)
17:15	20:15	"Soul Mate" (serial)
18:00	21:00	Express
18:30	21:30	News in Armenian
18:50	21:50	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
19:20	22:20	Pan-Armenian Star
19:45	22:45	Mosfilm
20:50	23:50	Music Videos
21:30	0:30	News in Armenian
21:55	0:55	Late at Night
22:55	1:55	What Went Wrong
23:20	2:20	Exclusive
23:40	2:40	Cartoon
0:05	3:05	Pan-Armenian Star
0:30	3:30	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
1:00	4:00	Jokes
1:25	4:25	Cool Program
1:44	4:44	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Express
2:30	5:30	"Belissima" (serial)
3:15	6:15	"Women in Love" (serial)
4:00	7:00	In Reality

24 October

WEDNESDAY

EST	PST	Wednesday
4:30	7:30	Good Morning, Armenians!
5:30	8:30	What Went Wrong
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
7:05	10:05	"Suspects" (serial)
8:00	11:00	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
8:30	11:30	Pan-Armenian Star
8:45	11:45	Cool Program
9:15	12:15	Music Videos
9:25	12:25	Express
9:55	12:55	Exclusive
10:20	13:20	"Soul Mate" (serial)
11:05	14:05	News in English
11:25	14:25	Cartoon
11:45	14:45	Late at Night
12:45	15:45	What Went Wrong
13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
13:50	16:50	News in Armenian
14:10	17:10	"Women in Love" (serial)
14:55	17:55	News in English
15:15	18:15	"Suspects" (serial)
16:05	19:05	In Reality
16:30	19:30	"Belissima" (serial)
17:15	20:15	"Soul Mate" (serial)
18:00	21:00	Express
18:30	21:30	News in Armenian
18:50	21:50	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
19:20	22:20	Pan-Armenian Star
19:45	22:45	Cool Program
20:05	23:05	PS Club
21:00	0:00	Blitz
21:20	0:20	Music Videos
21:30	0:30	News in Armenian
21:55	0:55	Late at Night
22:55	1:55	What Went Wrong
23:20	2:20	Exclusive
23:40	2:40	Cartoon
0:05	3:05	Pan-Armenian Star
0:30	3:30	"Unhappy Happiness" (serial)
1:00	4:00	Teleduel
1:50	4:50	Blitz
2:05	5:05	Express
2:30	5:30	"Belissima" (serial)
3:15	6:15	"Women in Love" (serial)
4:00	7:00	In Reality

Satellite Broadcast Program Grid

22 – 28 October



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25 October			26 October			27 October			28 October		
THURSDAY			FRIDAY			SATURDAY			SUNDAY		
EST	PST	Thursday	EST	PST	Friday	EST	PST	Saturday	EST	PST	Sunday
4:30	7:30	Good Morning, Armenians!	4:30	7:30	Good Morning, Armenians!	4:30	7:30	Candid camera	4:30	7:30	Candid camera
5:30	8:30	What Went Wrong	5:30	8:30	What Went Wrong	5:10	8:10	What Went Wrong	4:50	7:50	Jokes
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian	6:00	9:00	News in Armenian	5:30	8:30	Jokes	5:30	8:30	What Went Wrong
6:20	9:20	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)	6:20	9:20	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)	6:00	9:00	News in Armenian	6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
7:05	10:05	"Suspects" (serial)	7:05	10:05	"Suspects" (serial)	6:20	9:20	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)	6:20	9:20	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
8:00	11:00	Unhappy Happiness (serial)	8:00	11:00	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	7:05	10:05	"Suspects" (serial)	7:05	10:05	"Suspects" (serial)
8:25	11:25	Pan-Armenian Star	8:25	11:25	Mosfilm	8:00	11:00	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	8:00	11:00	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding
8:45	11:45	Music Videos	9:50	12:50	Express	8:25	11:25	The Making of a Film	8:45	11:45	Cool Program
9:30	12:30	Express	10:20	13:20	"Soul Mate" (serial)	8:55	11:55	The Armenian Film	9:05	12:05	Music Videos
10:00	13:00	Exclusive	11:05	14:05	News in English	9:20	12:20	Music Videos	10:05	13:05	Express
10:20	13:20	"Soul Mate" (serial)	11:25	14:25	Cartoon	10:20	13:20	"Soul Mate" (serial)	10:40	13:40	Exclusive
11:05	14:05	News in English	11:45	14:45	Late at Night	11:05	14:05	Exclusive	11:05	14:05	VOA(The Voice of America)
11:25	14:25	Cartoon	12:45	15:45	Music Videos	11:25	14:25	Cartoon	11:25	14:25	Cartoon
11:45	14:45	Late at Night	13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)	11:45	14:45	Late at Night	11:50	14:50	Jokes
12:45	15:45	Yo-Yo	13:50	16:50	News in Armenian	12:45	15:45	Hot-Line	12:40	15:40	Hot-Line
13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)	14:10	17:10	"Women in Love" (serial)	13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)	13:05	16:05	"The Colour of Sin"(serial)
13:50	16:50	News in Armenian	14:55	17:55	News in English	13:50	16:50	News in Armenian	13:50	16:50	News in Armenian
14:10	17:10	"Women in Love" (serial)	15:15	18:15	"Suspects" (serial)	14:10	17:10	"Women in Love" (serial)	14:10	17:10	Late at night
14:55	17:55	News in English	16:05	19:05	In Reality	15:00	18:00	VOA(The Voice of America)	15:10	18:10	Yo-Yo
15:15	18:15	"Suspects" (serial)	16:30	19:30	"Belissima" (serial)	15:20	18:20	"Suspects" (serial)	15:35	18:35	Blitz
16:05	19:05	In Reality	17:15	20:15	"Soul Mate" (serial)	16:05	19:05	What Went Wrong	15:55	18:55	What Went Wrong
16:30	19:30	"Belissima" (serial)	18:00	21:00	Express	16:30	19:30	Teleduel	16:20	19:20	Concert
17:15	20:15	"Soul Mate" (serial)	18:30	21:30	News in Armenian	17:30	20:30	Cool Program	18:05	21:05	Cool Program
18:00	21:00	Express	18:50	21:50	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	17:50	20:50	Express	18:25	21:25	VOA(The Voice of America)
18:30	21:30	News in Armenian	19:10	22:10	Captives of Fate (serial)	18:20	21:20	Music Videos	18:45	21:45	PS Club
18:50	21:50	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	19:55	22:55	Mosfilm	18:30	21:30	News in Armenian	19:45	22:45	Exclusive
19:10	22:10	Captives of Fate (serial)	21:30	0:30	News in Armenian	18:50	21:50	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	20:10	23:10	News
19:55	22:55	Cool Program	21:55	0:55	Late at Night	19:10	22:10	Captives of Fate (serial)	20:35	23:35	Jokes
21:00	0:00	Blitz	22:55	1:55	What Went Wrong	19:55	22:55	The Making of a Film	21:30	0:30	News in Armenian
21:20	0:20	Music Videos	23:20	2:20	Exclusive	20:30	23:30	The Armenian Film	21:55	0:55	Late at Night
21:30	0:30	News in Armenian	23:40	2:40	Cartoon	21:30	0:30	News in Armenian	22:55	1:55	The Week
21:55	0:55	Late at Night	0:05	3:05	Discovery	21:55	0:55	Late at Night	23:20	2:20	What Went Wrong
22:55	1:55	Yo-Yo	0:30	3:30	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	22:55	1:55	What Went Wrong	23:45	2:45	Cartoon
23:20	2:20	Exclusive	0:50	3:50	PS Club	23:15	2:15	Exclusive	0:05	3:05	Yo-Yo
23:40	2:40	Cartoon	1:40	4:40	Blitz	23:40	2:40	Cartoon	0:30	3:30	Cool Program
0:05	3:05	What Went Wrong	2:00	5:00	Express	0:05	3:05	Cool Program	0:50	3:50	Hot-Line
0:30	3:30	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	2:30	5:30	"Belissima" (serial)	0:30	3:30	Big, Fat Armenian Wedding	1:15	4:15	PS Club
0:50	3:50	Candid camera	3:15	6:15	"Women in Love" (serial)	0:50	3:50	Hot-Line	1:55	4:55	Discovery
1:20	4:20	Cool Program	4:00	7:00	In Reality	1:15	4:15	Music Videos	2:20	5:20	Teleduel
1:40	4:40	Blitz				1:45	4:45	Discovery	3:00	6:00	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Express				2:10	5:10	Blitz	3:20	6:20	Blef
2:30	5:30	"Belissima" (serial)				2:55	5:55	Teleduel	3:45	6:45	Exclusive
3:15	6:15	"Women in Love" (serial)				3:45	6:45	"Women in Love" (serial)	4:05	7:05	Music Videos
4:00	7:00	In Reality									



Katherine
Johnson and
Jozben Barrett.

A Time to Forget

**reviewed by Aram
Kouyoumdjian**

The 100th anniversary of William Saroyan's birth does not roll around until next year, but the commemorative productions of his plays have already begun. Among the early starters was a staging of *The Time of Your Life* by the Department of Theatre at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). This gem of a piece from 1939 – which won the playwright the Pulitzer Prize for Drama – had a brief run at the university's Little Theatre until October 14. Despite its best intentions, however, director Peter Grego's production proved

Aram Kouyoumdjian is the winner of Elly Awards for both playwriting (*The Farewells*) and directing (*Three Hotels*). His latest work is *Velvet Revolution*.

deeply disappointing, marred by a surface treatment of Saroyan's challenging text and superficial performances from key cast members.

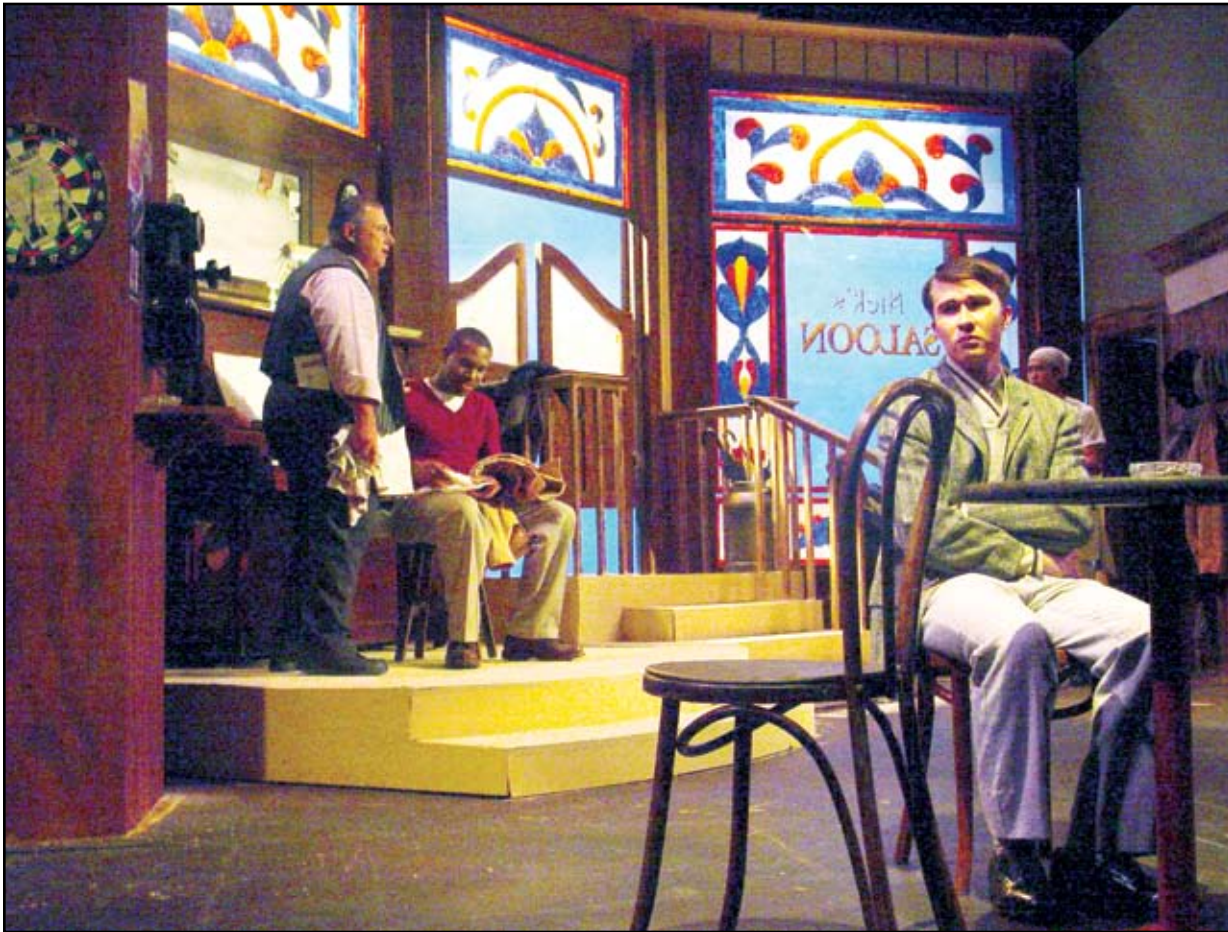
A loosely plotted play, *The Time of Your Life* captures a day at Nick's Saloon, a dive bar along San Francisco's waterfront. Central to the action is Joe, a mysteriously wealthy man, who wiles away his hours endlessly sipping champagne. Attending to his whims is his sidekick, Tom, who encounters – and immediately falls in love with – Kitty, a prostitute with a heart of gold.

Prostitutes, longshore workers, sailors, and a philosophizing immigrant are among the regulars of the saloon, along with Willie, a pinball whiz; Harry, an aspiring entertainer; and Wesley, a “colored” piano player. An uptown society couple drops in, as does Kit Carson, a legendary teller of tall tales.

Saroyan's play is deceptive in its simplicity. Lurking beneath the quirky action in the saloon – accentuated by Harry's tap dances and ridiculous monologues – is the ever-present desperation of the Depression era and the looming threat of World War II. The play achieves a particular complexity by pitting Saroyanesque qualities – adherence to hope and faith in love – against the cruelties of the world.

It is significant that Saroyan wrote the play in the waning years of a proletarian movement in American literature. Even though Saroyan was not directly involved in this Communist-influenced movement in a way that dramatists Maxwell Anderson, Paul Green, John Howard Lawson, Robert Sherwood, and, perhaps most famously, Clifford Odets were, his writing often reflected its essential features, including

review



A loosely plotted play *The Time of Your Life* captures a day at Nick's Saloon, a dive bar along San Francisco's waterfront.

working-class characters, storylines, themes, and perspectives. As critic James H. Justus has observed, "Saroyan had a distinctive voice which spoke of and for the '30s."

With the exception of its fine set and authentic costumes, however, the CSUN production missed the mood of that decade, and the political subtext of Saroyan's play was virtually glossed over. In referencing events unfolding outside the saloon, for instance, director Grego seemed to pay more heed to a chorus of Salvation Army volunteers than the brewing – and ultimately violent – longshore workers' strike.

The play's political potency was further diluted through colorblind casting, which upended the racial dynamics of the day (much like director Tamar Hovannisian recently did in her revisionist staging of *Hello Out There* at Luna Playhouse). Casting an Af-

rican-American actor as Joe, who is supposed to be of Irish stock, was not only perplexing (since the audience was supposed to ignore the color of his skin, yet notice Wesley's), but led to unintended racial stereotypes (since the play opens with Joe awaiting the delivery of some watermelon).

A strong cast may have overcome these distractions, but Grego's ensemble was not up to the task. In Jozben Barrett's hands, Joe had the heft of a sitcom character. The poignant moment in which Joe explains his attachment to children's toys – connected to the death of his mother – was thrown away. Similarly wasted was one of the play's most enthralling scenes, in which Joe spontaneously confesses love to Mary, an elegant (yet melancholy) married lady who steps into the bar and occupies the table next to Joe's. Their melodic conversation about unrequited love should

have been dreamy and heart-breaking. Instead, it came across as uninspired and entirely devoid of poetry.

Spencer Downie had moments as Tom, as did Stephen Neiswanger as Harry, but Katherine Johnson's turn as Kitty had too few layers, Chris Pandolfi and Rachel Landis barely registered as the society couple, and Joey Olson's take on Kit Carson amounted to no more than caricature. Add to all that some superfluous sound effects (a rainstorm with thunder!), glaringly fake piano playing, and a gnawing incongruity between the piano music and the harmonica with which it was supposed to harmonize, and the dissonance became, at times, too much for the senses.

The production may have been meant as a birthday gift to Saroyan. In this instance, however, it will have to be the thought that counts. ■■

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