

French Poetry Night a Hit at CSUF

■**ARTS:** A Humanities room was transformed into a hip coffee house for a night with a surgeon turned poet

BY TIM PLUMLEY
Special to the Titan

Sitting in a dark room, a lonely guitar plays. The room is filled with the thick French accent of Jean-Noël Chrisment as he recites, "Ce depotoir funeraire battu par les vagues," or "This funeral dump beaten by the waves."

"Death is no longer black – it's gray," Chrisment recites in French. "Tar on the shore plays this part in that tint, blackness, better than the droppings of the lightweight dead." Whatever the translation, whatever the language, it was easy to hear the emotion on Friday night.

Students, from all levels of French, were treated to an appearance by Chrisment and recited their French poetry at the fifth annual French Poetry Night. Hélène Domon, a professor of French, was one of the main organizers and the key to bringing Chrisment overseas. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, the Associated Students, Inc. and the Humanities and Social Sciences Interclub Council sponsored the event.

Chrisment, an orthopedic sur-

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geon turned poet, was flown in from New Caledonia, a territory of France situated in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, solely for this event. A \$2,000 Interclub Council grant was used to finance his visit. He recited some of his published works as well as previews of new poems.

was an honor and privilege to be asked by Professor Domon," Chrisment said.

Ten poets ranging from French beginners to graduates and master's degree students participated in the event.

Some poems were whimsical while others were macabre.

Junior Sylvia Macasil, a French major, attended as a French Club member to support her friends.

"A lot of the poems were heavy," Macasil said. "Some were funny but most were serious, I guess that it is just what is in the hearts and mind of that particular person."

English major J.D. Isip said, "the poetry was pretty impressive for a small group."

Isip was one of the many students

who read their work.

Linda Andersen, a French professor, thought the event went well.

"It was fantastic," Andersen said. "The quality and the imagery in the poetry were extraordinary. Adding music to the poems added another dimension."

Many of the poems were accompanied by live music. Readers had the option of having musical accompaniment.

To get the right mood for each poem, Domon, as well as Nabil Dagher and Rami Raheb, met with the participants a few times to rehearse.

The readers were able to choose light, upbeat music, such as a bouncy guitar, or more down-tempo melancholy music, such as a lone flute or a slowly strummed guitar. Some read their poems as is.

French 101 student Suzanne Ma concluded the more than an hour-long event by singing Ernest Chausson's opera song "Le Temps des Lilas," loosely translated as "The time of the Lilacs."

"We teach them well in 101," Domon joked.

For Domon the event was very gratifying because she has known

many of the students since the beginning courses and was able to see them blossom.

"The teamwork amongst the students and the levels of poems were very nice," Domon said. "It was great to be able to take poetry to a level students could relate to."

All of the poems, including Chrisment's, were translated from French to English. Translating each poem was a laborious task by faculty and students. Domon said each poem was thoroughly reviewed to ensure that nothing was lost in the translation. The translations were projected through the use of PowerPoint and the French versions were printed in *Oeuvres Titanesques*, a collection of most of the poems read Friday. In addition, students promoted the event and produced the program.

Students were introduced to Chrisment's works earlier in the year. Domon, who was familiar with his writings having met him previously, suggested some of his works to the students. They were impressed and invited him as their guest.

Chrisment said his main subjects are about mankind and the human

condition, specifically the human condition against the difficulties of life and the world. He tends to reflect on death, love and the body.

"Chrisment was excellent," Isip said. "He read slow enough for us which was really nice."

Chrisment sold his collection of poetry titled "Extrémités." Chrisment said that the title is ambiguous, but refers to the idea that we all are born with physical extremities such as arms and legs, and we also have mental extremities like philosophy, poetry and art.

Chrisment was impressed with most of the student poetry but emphasized that the act of writing poetry and reciting it is more important than what the poem actually means or says.

Following the readings, a reception was held on the eighth floor. Students and guests ate French hors d'oeuvres like Brie and crackers and drank sparkling fruit juice. They mingled with each other and were able to speak to Chrisment about his poems and visit to Fullerton.

Chrisment is scheduled to stay until Thursday where Domon is hoping to have another reading in one of her classes.