

Earnest Hemingway

A 1957 TV dramatization of the writer's short stories is brought back to life by Paul Newman and A.E. Hotchner for a star-packed but heartfelt benefit

By **KARIN LIPSON**
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A FEW MONTHS AGO, some high-voltage stars (think Julia Roberts, Matt Damon, Gwyneth Paltrow, Morgan Freeman and Alec Baldwin, for starters) got a discreet letter or phone call from that Hollywood icon, Paul Newman. Would they be interested in joining him on Nov. 19 in a one-night performance at Lincoln Center to benefit the Hole in the Wall Gang Camps, the retreats for seriously ill children that Newman cofounded in 1988 with his pal, writer A.E. Hotchner?

Now, when Newman talks, people tend to listen. (Wouldn't you?) Add to that the worthiness of the charity and the allure of the evening's program: Hotchner's own dramatization — created for TV in 1957 and never seen since — of some famed short stories by Ernest Hemingway, backed by music composed for that long-ago evening by Aaron Copland.

And so was born "The World of Nick Adams," a staged reading with music that comes Monday to Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall. In addition to the fairly eye-popping roster of actors (which also includes Kevin Kline, Meryl Streep, Brian Dennehy, Joanne Woodward, Philip Seymour Hoffman and James Naughton), the evening will feature conductor Leonard Slatkin, leading the Orchestra of St. Luke's in Copland's orchestral score. Proceeds from the event go to the Association of Hole in the Wall Camps, the new umbrella organization for five not-for-profit camps (all children attend free of charge) in this country and abroad, with three more in formation.

Remarkably, the "Nick Adams" dramatization had long been missing and only recently came to light at the Library of Congress. "I somehow lost control of the script," says Hotchner. "Over the years I occasionally thought about it, because it was an electrifying experience."

And therein hangs a four-decade-old tale. In 1957 Hotchner adapted five semi-autobiographical Hemingway stories for a live CBS broadcast produced by John Houseman. Hotchner had adapted one Hemingway story — "The Battler" — for TV the previous year. "The lead was supposed to be James Dean, but he was killed before we went to rehearsal," Hotchner recalls. "So they put into he lead a young actor named Paul Newman, and that's how we met." Newman's TV performance as a punch-drunk fighter, Hotchner re-



Photo by Miki Duisterhof

A.E. Hotchner and Paul Newman's staged reading, "The World of Nick Adams," takes place Monday at Avery Fisher Hall.

called, led to his being cast as boxer Rocky Graziano in the 1956 film "Somebody Up There Likes Me.")

Hotchner was also friendly with Hemingway, having edited his work. When the possibility of the 1957 broadcast came up, "I called Ernest, and he said, 'Well, you did all right for the first one. So he said, go ahead.'"

Because the script was episodic, music was needed as a unifying

element. "But not the weeping violins of Hollywood," says Hotchner.

So, in what he now describes as youthful naivete, Hotchner called up none other than Copland ("I got a number I thought was Copland's assistant or office, and instead I got him"), who soon agreed to write the score. "I had admired Hemingway since the '20s," Copland later recalled, "and I found the idea of composing for the new and exciting medi-

um of television intriguing."

The 1957 telecast tracked the adventures of the young protagonist, Nick Adams. "This is autobiographical, it's really Hemingway's account of running away from Oak Park, Ill., and hitting the road across America, and winding up in the Italian Army, where he gets severely wounded" during World War I, Hotchner ex-

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plans. "What happens is there are these people he encounters along the way," each encounter making for a separate story.

Though the telecast led to a 1962 film version ("Adventures of a Young Man"), the work then sank into oblivion until eight or nine months ago, when a young Copland scholar contacted Hotchner after unearthing the original score and script at the Library of Congress.

"The script was my script, and they released it readily," says Hotchner. "I was rather surprised by the vitality of it." Since the work held up, Hotchner reasoned, why not revise it as a concert piece? For that matter, why not organize it as a benefit for the new association he and Newman had been organizing for the Hole in the Wall Camps?

Newman made those all-important approaches to what Hotchner calls his "ideal cast." (Nick Adams is played by Damon.) To secure music rights, Hotchner contacted Michael Boriskin, a pianist and artistic director of Copland House, the Westchester County home of the late composer. Boriskin, in

turn, got the OK from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, which controls the late composer's output, to revive the long-unheard score.

And what kind of score is it? Copland "tailored his music to the original script," says Boriskin, who is serving as music adviser to the benefit. "I think Copland managed to pull off the trick of creating music that was both spare and grand."

For Hotchner, the benefit not only gives new life to an old work, it also provides a satisfying full circle for his friend, Paul Newman, that young actor who played Hemingway's old boxer in "The Battler."

"It occurred to me," says Hotchner, "if I do a concert piece out of this . . . Newman can repeat that role. Which is what he's going to do." ■

WHERE&WHEN A benefit performance of "The World of Nick Adams" will be given at 7:30 Monday at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center. Tickets: \$75-\$2,500. Post-performance reception for \$1,000 and \$2,500 ticket holders. For tickets call 212-573-6933.