



MUSIC TO MY EARS

Paul Robeson in Carnegie Hall

WHATEVER else may have befallen him, the years have dealt kindly with Paul Robeson's abilities as a performer. His recent return to Carnegie Hall after many a long year's absence (are there any short ones for the dispossessed?) began with a rising tide of applause from the capacity attendance. It was no slight task to re-establish a rapport with his listeners after a lapse—locally—of eleven years. One thing led to another (amid more than encouraging applause) and finally to a spiritual about "Climbin' Up Jacob's Ladder," in which he invited the audience to join. When they did, Robeson as an experienced entertainer and showman knew they were his. The expansion of mood was almost visible, the relaxation of tension equally tangible.

In his earlier groups, Robeson showed that the voice which has been his professional asset for singing, speaking, or acting over a full thirty-five year span is still potent and pliable, also plangent. It seemed to beg the question somewhat, in terms of Carnegie Hall utility, for him to utilize a powerful complement of speakers at either side of the stage. But, whether the audience realized it or not, they were paid attendants at a recording session, and the arrangement may have been devised to relieve the singer of any inclination to strain. Listening at a point where the amplification did not overlap, it seemed that the raw stuff of the voice is basically unimpaired, as richly malleable and essentially untrained as in the days when his Town Hall appearances in the Thirties were, however frequent, always musts. A new mannerism was the right hand cupped behind the ear from time to time, doubtless to blot out the confusing "voices" from the speakers.

It was evident from his opening group (which proceeded from an opening Elizabethan air, "Over the Mountains," glorifying love, to a setting of Blake's "Jerusalem," the spiritual "Balm in Gilead," a Smetana arrangement of a Moravian hymn to freedom, and a concluding treatment of Beethoven's setting of Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in terms of "one for all and all for one") that this was less a recital than a preachment. The implicit became explicit toward the end of the next group when, after persuading the audience to join him in

song, he digressed to a lengthy explanation of why he juxtaposed Hebraic material with African, and African with Chinese. They were, he explained, part of a long-range affinity which manifests itself in the music of folk around the world. This basic musicological truth was received by his audience as a revelation, aided no little by Robeson's histrionic talent for vivifying a commonplace by an inflection of speech, a thrust of the head or even, when pertinent, a bit of truckin'.

ROBESON remains a man of magnificent vocal endowments with a highly cultivated sense of phrase and accent, a power of articulation second to none among his contemporaries.

Every word he sang in English was clearly intelligible and, when he spoke, it was with that rolling command to the attention recalled from ventures dating to "All God's Chillun" of the mid-Twenties. On the other hand, the suggestion that he was equal to the demands of a key section from Moussorgsky's "Boris" (a prayer from the "Death of Boris") was nullified by its limited vocal range, centering around E flat and a neighboring tone or two.

As the evening progressed, Robeson tended more and more to use the occasion as a sounding board for his grievances which, however obliquely stated, were clearly apparent to his sympathetic listeners. Musically, the occasion profited from the accompaniments of Allan Booth, who maintained the high standards associated with Lawrence Brown, Robeson's invariable collaborator of other days. He did not do as well in a solo group, which nevertheless did not discourage interest in hearing him at greater length on his own.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

The Poet (after "L'Ultima Rinunzia" of Guido Gozzano, 1883-1916)

By Felix Stefanile

MY MOTHER wept, her sickness sure;
solace I had none at heart.
While the woman lay there dying,
for a poem I kept trying.
"Son," she called, "leave your art;
bring me water for my cure."

"I shall call the maid," I said,
whittling at the witty words.
"She will bring a draught for sleeping;
you may leave off your weeping."
In the gloom silver birds
made white music around her bed.

In the night the wind grew still,
and I worked my vessel smooth.
"Son," my mother called, "what shade
stands across where I am laid,
in the figure of a youth?"
"Make of it what you will,

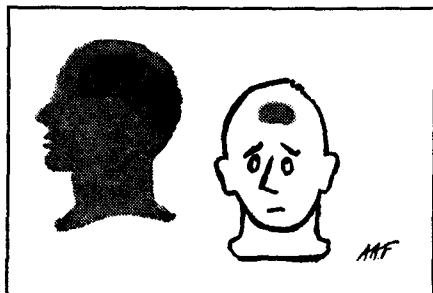
I shall call the maid," I said,
"for my work is much too dear.
You may talk to her, and pray
until the coming of the day,
but I must be busy here.
White music fills my head."

Then my mother ceased her turning.
With the coming of the dawn
all the words made silver dance.
Sun flashed, like a lance,
shearing tree-top, roof and stone,
toward my chamber, burning, burning.

Whither the American School?

Ever since the first satellite vaulted into space Americans have been searching their schools for the reason why we fell behind the Soviet Joneses. For the first time a shocked public realized that its cherished educational system might not be as pre-eminent as its iceboxes. The result has been a flurry of articles, speeches, and books demanding curricular changes. That these have sometimes been contradictory is reflected in a number of recent studies, among them those discussed in these pages: "Second-Rate Brains," edited by Kermit Lansner; "The Revolution in Education," by Mortimer J. Adler and Milton Mayer; "Schools Without Scholars," by John Keats; "TV and Our School Crisis," by Charles A. Siepmann; "Moral Values in Public Education," by Ellis Ford Hartford, and "Education and Human Relations," by Ashley Montagu.

I. A Warning



"Second-Rate Brains," edited by **Kermit Lansner** (Doubleday. 96 pp. \$1.50), is an anthology of comments on American education by some of our country's first-rate brains. Fred M. Hechinger, who evaluates their statements, wrote *"Adventure in Education: Connecticut Points the Way."*

By Fred M. Hechinger

THE cover of this small but important book warns bluntly: "Our schools, colleges, laboratories are turning out second-rate brains." The first reflex reaction is to write this off as another one of the extremist and alarmist attacks on American education which seem to have been launched en masse together with Sputnik.

A second look, however, shows at once that this carefully edited book contains a different kind of warning. Its voices are not those of the new band of opportunists who, having been deaf to the needs of the schools in the past are now posing as their dis-

coverers. Kermit Lansner, with the experienced eye of the editor, has collected the writings of experts who base their criticism on years of experience and knowledge. Where they are scolding, they are doing so with the love of the disappointed friend, not with the destructive venom of the sniper.

With clinical sharpness, Mr. Kermit's blue pencil has stripped this vital topic of superfluous words. First, he lets experts—among them Nicholas DeWitt, Alexander G. Korol, and Dr. I. I. Rabi—tell of the Russian achievement. They do this without the chauvinistic smugness that has for so long sapped America's strength, and without the childish panic that recently has turned every Soviet gas station attendant into a rocket-launching Einstein.

Here is no hysterical demand that the American classroom be remade in the Soviet image—a demand that screams from too many headlines. Here is instead Mr. Korol's sober statement that "for the free nations to believe they can somehow achieve their social goals and scientific, technological, and moral superiority while continuing to carry on their educational efforts and all the other pursuits of life 'as usual' is to refuse to face the realities of the world scene..."

These men don't ask us to play the "numbers game" in turning out one American per mathematics hour for each Soviet math major. They don't ask for a science "crash program." Dr. Rabi says simply that "we must teach science as an intellectual pursuit rather than as a body of tricks" and,

he adds wistfully, that "as yet, if a man has no feeling for art he is considered narrow-minded, but if he has no feeling for science he is considered quite normal."

IN ITS second part this hastily, but carefully assembled anthology deals with mediocrity that has crept (or perhaps, galloped) into the American school and into American thinking. If the remedies proposed by such men as Admiral Hyman Rickover and historian Arthur Bestor may be too drastic, their analysis of the shortcomings is as necessary as an unsentimental, honest diagnosis of the disease before the patient can be entrusted to therapy or, if necessary, the surgeon's knife. Possibly Mr. Bestor's charge that the American school's "life adjustment" may have turned into "death adjustment" in the watered-down curriculum seems extreme; but when he cites the California State Board of Education as prohibiting the state colleges from requiring a foreign language for graduation, one wonders.

In the last part such thoughtful men as Robert Oppenheimer think out loud about "solutions." They ask for effort and thought—not to ape Russia but to create a real respect for the capacity of the mind. They don't hide their belief that America, through learning without tears, has come to be the sanctuary for second-rate brains, but they also are deeply convinced that the United States can produce all the first-rate minds it needs, if it only pulls itself out of its self-satisfied mental stagnation.