

JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER. A play, with songs.

Written and performed by Tayo Aluko, with Babatunde Şosan, piano

Agip Hall, MUSON, Onikan, Lagos. Wednesday, 7 June, 2017

Greetings, welcome. On the flight from the UK yesterday, I got to watch the inspiring and beautiful film, *Hidden Figures*, which tells the previously untold story of how teams of African-American women, previously relegated to back-room computing jobs in NASA, became crucial to the 1960s American space programme. This happened in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, but the scientific and racial gains made since then seem to have been reversed, and the clock turned back several decades in the last few months. To a large extent, that trajectory has been mirrored here in Nigeria steadily over decades, with the heady optimism of the immediate post-independence era now looking like little more than a barely remembered dream. Those responsible for dashing that dream are many, with the White Man bearing only part of the responsibility. The history is complex, but this play tries to help decipher it, as a contribution to the education which will counter the conflict and distrust that continue to plague our country. In revisiting the stories of equality struggles here and around the world, we also pay tribute to those who fought so bravely and sacrificed so much to shake off the shackles of oppression. To quote our national anthem, “the labours of our heroes past shall never be in vain.” Furthermore, the school song of Tunji Sowande’s alma mater, King’s College, instructs us to give “honour to our dead.” It is indeed an honour to dedicate this inaugural Nigerian performance of *LAWYER* to one who was certainly no ordinary man at all, and I am grateful to the Şaşęgbõn family for generously giving me the opportunity to feature in this tribute to him on the tenth anniversary of his passing. May he continue to rest in peace, and may we, through stories like his, continue to inspire us to unleash the potential of all Nigerian people. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. Tayo, the youngest son of the late novelist T M Aluko, lives in Liverpool, UK. As a singer he has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as *Nabucco*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *Anything Goes*. His first play, *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals internationally. He has toured the play around the UK, the USA, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, including New York’s Carnegie Hall in 2012. He delivers a lecture/concert called *PAUL ROBESON – THE GIANT, IN A NUTSHELL*, and another one titled *FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE: a talk about Black Political Resistance*, illustrated with spirituals. He researched, wrote and narrated to camera a piece on West African History before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which forms part of the permanent exhibit at Liverpool’s International Slavery Museum. His 15-minute play, *HALF MOON*, which also deals with ancient Africa, has been performed several times in the UK. He has developed a piece titled *WHAT HAPPENS?* featuring the writings of African American Langston Hughes, for performance with live jazz accompaniment. He has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana* and *Searchlight Magazine*. *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2016, and will feature in the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, USA, in August.

Babatunde Şosan, Piano. Tunde is a qualified as a physiotherapist at the College of Medicine, Lagos University Teaching Hospital, but works as a composer, concert pianist and organist. His formative musical training began with his grandmother, Arinola Sosan (Nee Phillips) at age 7. He later went on to complete a 5-year course (sponsored by the Women's Guild Auxiliary Society of the Cathedral Church of Christ) at the Trinity College of Music, Greenwich, England, graduating with a Bachelor of Music degree in Piano and Organ performance. He is now Organist and Master of the Music at the renowned Cathedral Church of Christ, Marina, Lagos, a post he assumed exactly a century after his great grandfather, the renowned TKE Phillips.

Amanda Huxtable, Director. Amanda trained at Manchester Metropolitan University, Recreational Arts in the Community course, followed by studying for a BA Degree in Communications and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds. She continues to strengthen her practice by studying Social Sciences and The Arts Past and Present at the Open University. Amanda served as Artistic Director of Yorkshire Women Theatre Company in Leeds from 2004-2009. She is building her portfolio of freelance directing work across the UK. She also enjoys being part of a writer-and-director team with Marcia Layne, and together they run Hidden Gems Productions, a theatre company committed to telling rarely told Black British Stories: Black British and Bold. Theatre Directing credits for Hidden Gems tours 2010 -2016 include: Bag Lady, Somebody's Son, Lost & Found, The Yellow Doctress - all by Marcia Layne. Freelance Director credits include: The Promise, by Chris Cooper (Belgrade Theatre Tour), The Dressmaker's Gift, by Anita Franklin (Liverpool's Write Now International Festival), Totally Over You, by Mark Ravenhill (Lawrence Batley Theatre), Continent Chop Chop, by Virtual Migrants, HD100 (Chol Theatre). She was recently Associate Director on Wakefield Mysteries, adapted by Nick Lane (Theatre Royal Wakefield), and is an Artistic Associate at Hull Truck Theatre, under the Arts Council's Changemakers Programme.

Emma Williams, Designer. Emma trained as a theatre designer at Wimbledon School of Art and has worked extensively for touring companies, including recently with Hidden Gems, Utopia Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, RJC Youth Dance and Leeds University, Freedom Studios, Polka Theatre, "Unlimited Theatre, and Soho Poly Theatre. Opera credits include: "Siroe" Royal College of Music; "Partenope"; Admeto"; "Alceste" all for Cambridge Handel Opera at New Hall Cambridge; "La Cenerentola"; "The Tales of Hoffman" and "Genevieve de Brabant", French Institute, London.

Esther Wilson, Dramaturg. Esther writes for stage, TV & radio. Her first R4 play 'Hiding Leonard Cohen' won a Mental Health in Media award. The Heroic Pursuits of Darleen Fyles is an on-going series for Woman's Hour on R4. Her stage play 'Soulskin' toured nationally with Red Ladder. She was lead writer on the award-winning 'Unprotected'. 'Ten Tiny Toes' was shortlisted for a TMA award. In Collaboration with Paula Simms, Esther worked on 'The Quiet Little Englishman', set in a disused cinema, for Liverpool's Capital of Culture. The piece was hugely ambitious and critically acclaimed. The sequel to the R3 version of Tony Teardrop was commissioned by R4. Esther's TV work includes: Jimmy McGovern's The Street (RTS award for best newcomer), Accused, Moving On, Call the Midwife and The White Princess.

Lighting Design: Mark Loudon; **Sound Design:** Noel Inyang and Tayo Aluko

Forthcoming Performances Include

June 11: The Place, Bedford; **July 12, 14, 16:** Buxton Fringe Festival;
July 3 – 5: National Black Theatre Festival, Winston-Salem, USA; **August 21 – 26:** Edinburgh Fringe;
Sept 24, 25: Swallow Theatre, Whithorn, Dumfries & Galloway
Early September 2017 (tbc): Lagos, Nigeria

Call Mr. Robeson: June 10: Leominster Festival; **July 6 – 8:** Tara Theatre, London;
July 13,15,16: Buxton Fringe Festival; **August 21 – 26:** Edinburgh Fringe

Tayo Aluko & Friends

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