

JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER. A play, with songs.

Written and performed by Tayo Aluko, with Martin Robinson, piano

Theatr Clwyd, Mold. Saturday, 28 September, 2019

Today's commentary. I recall meeting a Nigerian lady at an event in London nine years ago who told me that she organised trips for Nigerian politicians to the UK and the USA to see how “they do things there.” I wonder how she’s doing these days. Of course, one is familiar with the concepts of disaster tourism and hurricane chasing, so if she is still in that business, she might be doing very well. The idea that Africans still have things to learn from Europeans and Americans is indeed part of a centuries-old process whereby too many of us have been persuaded that the flow of knowledge, wisdom and information can only be to Africa, where before the arrival of the White man, there was no history, culture, religion, technology or government worth speaking of. When one considers that 16th and 17th century Portuguese travellers to Benin reported how that city and its governance were much more advanced than they had seen back home, and adds that to the numerous other examples of impressive pre-colonial African civilisation, one realises that this process of miseducation must have been quite deliberate. I firmly believe that ongoing problems in Africa and those encountered by her people both there and in the Diaspora persist in no small part because of insufficient knowledge of and connection to those histories. European colonisation of Africa, even though it is so recent in our history, was a crucial part of that process of disconnection and miseducation, partly through the institutions that were set up – from schools to governmental structures. The liberation struggles are also a vital part of our joined histories, and this play tries to contribute to their illumination and re-examination, and to pay tribute to a few of the figures who led and participated in those movements. Such stories remind us that great change comes by vast numbers of people coming together for a common cause. The most urgent cause today is the climate crisis, to which our political and business leaders appear to be so reluctant to devote necessary attention. African liberation struggles can provide Global Climate Strike with some valuable lessons and inspiration.

Tayo Aluko, Writer, Performer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, worked as an architect in Liverpool for many years. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and has also performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as *Nabucco*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *Anything Goes*. His first play, *CALL MR ROBESON* won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, as well as highly favourable reviews in the press – most notably *The Guardian* and BBC Radio 4. He has toured it 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 2016 Edinburgh Fringe, and featured in the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, USA in August 2017, and at the Harare International Festival of the Arts, Zimbabwe in May 2018. He was one of a group of “outstanding writers of colour” invited to write and perform responses to artefacts held in Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum in September 2019.

Martin Robinson, Piano. Martin Robinson has wide experience playing as pianist for choirs and soloists. On sax and keyboards he has played throughout Britain and in Europe with his own jazz band, Skokiaan, and with Mamadou Diaw and other bands and singers. He is delighted to be working with Tayo Aluko on a show with such a strong message.

Amanda Huxtable, Director. Amanda Huxtable is an experienced Theatre Director, Creative Producer and Trustee. She has recently completed a successful two year role as the Changemaker and Artistic Associate at Hull Truck Theatre. Amanda is a Trustee and Chair of the Board for RJC (Reggae, Jazz, Contemporary) Dance based in Leeds. She continues to build on her portfolio of Theatre Productions across the UK and further afield. Together with Vanitas Arts based in Sheffield she is developing a special immersive theatre work called Trumpet based on the Guardian Fiction Prize book by Jackie Kay. As Co-Artistic Director of Hidden Gems with Marcia Layne, Amanda enjoyed five years touring Black British stories in the UK. Her Freelance Directorial work has toured to London, Edinburgh, Canada and the National Black Theatre Festival in North Carolina, USA. She continues to strengthen her practice by studying the Social Sciences, The Arts Past and Present and currently Early Modern European History 1500 -1780 at the Open University.

Emma Williams, Designer. Emma's recent design work includes "Jackie and the Beanstalk" Curly Tales, Leeds Playhouse, "Bad Blood Blues" Theatre Deli; "Shivers" Greenwich Theatre, national tour "The Netherlands" Two Tonne, Camden People's Theatre and touring ; "Shadows in Different Shades" Sheffield Crucible and Utopia;"Jack Frost" Barnsley Civic and "Birds Nest Billy" Fidget Theatre, national tour, "Abigail's Party" Hull Truck, "The Yellow Doctress," Hidden Gems, "HD100" for Chol at the Lawrence Batley Theatre, Terrace"; "Huddersfield"; "The Dutiful Daughter"-co-production with Szechuan People's Theatre, both directed by Amanda Huxtable. "Iyalode of Eti", Utopia Theatre; "Molly's Marvellous Moustache", Fidget and "You Forgot the Mince" Imagine If. Designs for Leeds Playhouse between 2003-2015 include:"Immune";"Nine Lives"; "Refugee Boy"; "You The Player" site specific co-production with Look Left Look Right; "Scuffer"; "Crap Dad"; "Two Tracks and Text Me";"Runaway Diamonds"; "Broken Angel"; "Sunbeam Chengdu, China; "Coming Around Again"; "The Elves and The Shoemakers"; "Pinocchio"; "The Magic Paintbrush" and the original version of "The Yellow Doctress". Other designs include "One Among Millions", co-pro between RJC Youth Dance and Leeds University, 2016; "Brief Encounters @Bradford Interchange, a site-specific piece for Freedom Studios; "Strawberries in January" Traverse, Edinburgh;"The Shoe", Polka Theatre; "The Swing Left" Unlimited Theatre; "Small Objects of Desire"; Soho Theatre. Opera credits include: "The Soldier's Tale" Skipton Camerata, "Siroe" Royal College of Music; "Partenope"; "Admeto"; "Alceste" New Hall Cambridge. She also designs immersive sets for escape rooms and teaches and mentors young artists entering the industry, most recently as part of Northern Ballet's Cultural Runway collaboration with Burberry.

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

Forthcoming Performances Include:

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: Nov 2: Unity Theatre, **Liverpool**

Call Mr. Robeson: Oct 26: Littleport Library, **Cambs;**

Feb 1: Bishop Center, **Aberdeen, WA, USA;** **March 3:** The Miners Theatre, **Ammanford;**

April 13 – 17: Sogang University, **Seoul, S. Korea.**

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