

# CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Cornelia Rahdes , Piano

The Met, Abertillery, Thursday 23 April, 2015

**Greetings, Welcome.** At yesterday's performance, I met a young student who was delighted to hear about Paul Robeson, despite having studied African American History. This didn't surprise me - that such a talented, brilliant and peace-loving man has been consigned to complete obscurity from today's generation. If they had the chance, the American authorities might have assassinated him (there are rumours that they tried a few times). Today, authorities in Pennsylvania appear to be trying to assassinate another man who is very much like Robeson, in that his brilliance has been dedicated to spreading messages of peace, love and justice around the world. He has been in jail for over thirty years, for an offence did not commit, and was on death row for most of that time, until worldwide protests eventually persuaded the authorities to release him into the general population. Today, he is dangerously ill in prison, and is being wilfully denied access to proper medical attention. His supporters' requests to get him seen by outside experts or for him to be moved out of the woefully inadequate prison medical centre have been refused. Chances are hardly anybody here today would have heard of Mumia Abu Jamal. He was a broadcaster in Philadelphia in the 1970s and used his wonderful voice to highlight police brutality on Black people in general. Today, over thirty years later, he still manages to broadcast from within prison, not just on race issues, but issues of concern to all citizens of the world. A listen to him on [prisonradio.org](http://prisonradio.org) would illustrate why this man is a target of the Pennsylvania authorities, and particularly the Fraternal Order of Police, and why they will be satisfied with nothing less than his death. It appears that they are getting close to achieving this, but if the eyes and ears of the world can be trained onto that Mahanoy Prison in Philadelphia, chances are they will be embarrassed into doing the right thing. One can do more than pray – one can get involved in the worldwide campaign to save a man whose continued life would be of infinitely more benefit to the world than those of the men that wish to kill him. People did the same for Robeson in the 50s, they did the same for Nelson Mandela. I take this opportunity to draw attention to the name and life of Mumia Abu Jamal. I hope you enjoy the show.

**Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer.** Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool. He worked previously as an architect and property developer, with a special but as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. 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*. *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, as well as highly favourable reviews in the press – most notably in the Guardian and on BBC Radio 4. He has toured the play around the UK, the USA, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, and at New York's Carnegie Hall in February 2012 on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. He also 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 has been performed in three continents. 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 recently 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*. He is currently working on a new play.

**Cornelia Rahdes, Piano and original incidental music.** Cornelia Rahdes was born in Schleswig, North Germany. She started playing the piano at the age of two, sat on her uncle's lap. Cornelia was fascinated by music, finding in it a means of expression, even at such a tender age. She studied music and German literature at Bremen University., She now works as a psychotherapist, piano teacher and music therapist in Powys, and is also Music Director of the Talgarth Community Choir. She composes and improvises for her choir and her own piano recitals, working with spoken word artists and other instrumentalists.

**Olusola Oyeleye, Director and Dramaturge.** Olusola is an award winning writer, director and producer working in opera, music theatre, visual arts and dance. Theatre includes: *Tin* (The Lowry), *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* (Collective Artistes & Sustained Theatre, Cottesloe), Resident director on Trevor Nunn's West End production of *Porgy and Bess* (Savoy Theatre), staff producer at English National Opera, Spirit of Okin and Sankofa for Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, (National & International tours), *Coming Up For Air* (The Drum & UK tour), *The Resurrection of Roscoe Powell* (Soho Theatre), *The Shelter* (RSC Barbican Theatre), *Medea* (Ariya, Royal National Theatre Studio), *The Playground* (Polka Theatre, Time Out Critics' Choice Pick of the Year), *High Life*, (Hampstead Theatre), *Maybe Father*, (Talawa, Young Vic), *Twelfth Night* (British Council Tour, Zimbabwe) and *Ella*, a monodrama about Ella Fitzgerald (Rich Mix). Opera includes: Akin Euba's *Orunmila's Voices: Songs from the Beginning of Time* (Jefferson's Arts Centre, New Orleans) and *Chaka: An Opera in Two Chants* with the St. Louis African Chorus, *Dido and Aeneas* (Tricycle/BAC), *God's Trombones* (Fairfield Halls) and the second cast revival of Jonathan Miller's production of *The Mikado* (English National Opera). Olusola has also worked in Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. She has been a visiting lecturer and Artist at Universities in South Africa and London, and was Head of the Acting Studio at Morley College. Her poetry has been set to music by Akin Euba and performed at both Harvard and Cambridge Universities. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

**Phil Newman, Designer.** Phil's Set & Costume Design credits include: *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK & UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *A Christmas Carol & Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink), an open-air *Romeo & Juliet* (Cornucopia Theatre), *The Liar* (South Hill Park), *Dance or Die* (Hoxton Hall), *Voices in the Alleyway & Yes, I Still Exist* (Spread Expression Dance), *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre) and film short *The Judge* for Faith Drama, *The Riddle of the Sands & Laurel and Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), *Hansel & Gretel* (UK tour), *Stockholm* (BAC), open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice & The Railway Children* (Heartbreak) and the award-winning UK/international touring production of *Hannah & Hanna*. Set Design credits include *Houdini* (UK tour), *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Others with Olusola Oyeleye include *A Wing, A Prey, A Song* (Guest Projects Africa), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *The Security Guard* (Merton AbbeyFest 2012), *Ella* (RichMix), *Coming Up for Air* (UK tour), *The Playground* (Polka Theatre) and *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House/Edinburgh). He has just completed Set Design work on Rouge28Theatre's new puppet show *Kwaidan*.

**Sound Design:** David Darlington & Liam McDermott. **Sound Engineering:** Derek Murray. **Lighting Design:** Gareth Starkey. **Recorded Percussion:** Oludele Olaseinde **Voices:** Shamus Maxwell, Paul O'Neill, Felix Pring, Kat Bishop, Suzanne Goldberg, Harry Arkwright, and from the original HUAC hearing of June 12 1956, "Honorable" Senators Walter, Arens and Scherer. **Male Voice Choir:** Liverpool Male Voice Choir

#### **Forthcoming Performances Include:**

**April 24, 25, Newport:** The Riverfront; **May 2,** Manchester: The Mechanics Institute;

**May 16, Walton-upon-Thames:** Riverhouse Barn; **May 23:** Barnsley Civic Hall

**August 7:** Threlkeld Village Hall, Cumbria; **October 24:** Swindon Arts Centre

**Nov 7:** Paramount Hudson Valley, Peekskill, New York

**Nov 12 - 15:** Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey

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