

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Glen Giffney, Piano
Alphabetti Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Saturday, October 10, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. It is difficult to conceive of a more shocking, depressing or outrageous deed than killing scores of people who have gone out of their way to attend a rally calling for peace. They had gathered in Ankara to protest their government's foray into the growing war against the group calling themselves IS, and allegedly using it as cover for attacks against the country's Kurdish minority. The madness has now clearly reached a new extreme, and it is no use trying to point fingers at any particular group and single them out as being any more evil, for we are all part of the system that has brought us to this new low. We have willingly or unwillingly elected leaders who continue to perpetuate the sale of arms around the world, initiate conflict, thinking nothing of the devastation they cause, for the sake of access to finite natural resources, the use of which threaten the wellbeing and future of the planet. As we see conflicts escalate in the Middle East and elsewhere, it must surely be increasingly obvious that those that continue to peddle the mantra that we must continue to ramp up the manufacture and use of armaments are not only providing no solutions to the problems, they are a fundamental part of the problem. One wonders where to look for sources of hope. At the risk of coming across as naïve and idealistic, there is a different kind of weapon that our society does not use enough of, and that is Art – in whatever form. For a fraction of what is spent on militarism, support and nurturing of Art can be shown to be as effective a way as any to draw people together and to show their shared humanity, their shared destiny. Paul Robeson, turning militaristic vocabulary on its head, determined to use his art as a weapon in support of his people and all oppressed people. As he said in his book, *Here I Stand*, describing the coming of WWII, "... the sound of marching jack boots drowned out the songs of brotherhood and love", but he sang on. He sang the beautiful songs that his people before him had created from the worst of horrors of modern history – the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – songs that have given the world so much hope and beauty out of such inhumanity. At a time like this, I am reminded of Dr. King, in a speech denouncing the Vietnam War, in which he quotes Danté: "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a time of moral crisis maintain their neutrality." So, taking inspiration from the beauty bequeathed us by those who have lived through even more horrible times than we are living now, let us join the great battle, and Make Art, Not War. 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 50th 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.

Glen Giffney, Piano. Glen trained at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, and then at the Royal Northern College of Music. He has been involved in numerous prestigious competitions throughout the UK and performed at the European Piano Teachers association in Belgium. He was a finalist in the Keldwyth Award held here in the Lake District. Although classically trained, Jazz has always been a passion in Glen's life and he is currently furthering his career as a Jazz musician.

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 & Assistant Director. Phil's Set & Costume Design credits include: *Saint/Jeanne* and *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *Hairspray*, *Cabaret & Attempts on her Life* (Amersham & Wycombe College), *Lord of the Flies & Grimm Tales* (Colet Court School), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *The Wizard of Oz*, *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*. His Set Design credits include *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Other collaborations with director 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 tour of *Kwaidan*, a Japanese ghost story with puppets.

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:

October 16: Seven Arts, Leeds; **October 17:** Paul Robeson Theatre, Hounslow; **October 24:** Swindon Arts Centre; **October 25:** Redgrave Theatre, Bristol;
October 28: The Witham, Barnard Castle; **October 31:** Teatro Technis, Camden, London;

Nov 7: Paramount Hudson Valley, Peekskill, New York;
Nov 12 - 15: Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey;
Nov 19 - 22: Bus Stop Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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