

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Diana English, Piano**

**ArtSpring, Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada.**

**Saturday, February 16, 2013.**

**Greetings and Welcome.** There's a benign energy that pervades Salt Spring Island. An energy that has long drawn artists from far and wide to settle here. An energy that native peoples appreciated, but thought it best not to permanently settle here, for they feared that the gentleness might make their men too feminine and unsuitable for battle! One is often tempted to romanticise the past, but it is clear that gentleness in men has never been appreciated as much as it ought to be. I know now that I shouldn't have been as surprised as I was to find that Salt Spring Islanders joined in the worldwide event to say NO! to violence against women ([onebillionrising.org](http://onebillionrising.org)) on Thursday, with the gentle mountains forming a beautiful backdrop to the dancing on McPhillips Avenue. I note that the name Vesuvius is not ascribed to one of those mountains, but to a quiet bay, for this is a gentle island. A more suitable name would be Mt. Robeson, making it the second mountain so named in the world, for such was the love and reverence held in the Soviet Union for the gentle giant Paul Robeson that a mountain in Russia was named after him in 1949, and bears his name still. Media manipulation is however as old as the hills, because Robeson's image, where he has one at all, is that of a dangerous revolutionary that had to be tamed. His crime was straying beyond the confines of entertainment and speaking out on behalf of the poor and oppressed, regardless of their colour, origin, or sex. He lived at a time when prevailing attitudes were much less enlightened than they are today, but was still prepared to rise up and use his voice as a weapon against injustice and inequality. We need more voices like his today, and those in authority need to hear them and heed them, in order to avoid the violent eruptions that have occurred in other parts of the world, even in some previously very gentle places. I hope you enjoy the show.

**Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer.** Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool. He worked until recently as an architect and property developer, with a special but as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. As a baritone, he has sung as soloist in British concert halls accompanied by orchestra, and has also sung in Germany, Ireland and Nigeria. He has performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as Nabucco, Kiss Me Kate and Anything Goes. CALL MR ROBESON won the Argus Angel Award for Artistic Excellence and Best Male Performer Award at the 2008 Brighton Festival Fringe, two Merit Awards for Excellence in London in 2010 and three awards at the London Ontario Fringe last June. He has performed the play around the UK, the United States of America, Canada and Nigeria, and at New York's Carnegie Hall in February 2012 for his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. His other piece titled FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE - a talk about Black Political Resistance, illustrated with Spirituals has also 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 fifteen-minute play, HALF MOON, which also deals with ancient Africa for a modern young audience has been performed several times in the UK.

**Diana English, Piano.** Diana began studying piano and singing at the age of four. She continued private studies with the renowned Darwin Aitken in Toronto and has received many awards and scholarships from festivals and competitions in Vancouver, as well as honours distinction for Royal Conservatory exams. Diana has worked professionally as an accompanist for Dance as well as Vocalists and Choirs and Churches. She studied recorder at the Toronto Music Conservatory, and has played and performed with several ensembles. Diana plays "Lounge Piano" every other Sunday evening at Harbour House Hotel Restaurant on Saltspring Island. With her husband Lloyd, she owns and operates the Peninsula Academy of Music Arts in Sidney.

**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, Assistant Dramaturge.** Phil's Set & Costume Designs have featured in productions by companies as diverse as Ladder to the Moon, Trestle, Ariya, Full House Theatre, London Shakespeare Workout, Rouge28 Theatre and Impetuous Kinship. Recent design credits include: *Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink Productions), *Dance or Die* (contemporary dance performance choreographed by Avant Garde's Tony Adigun), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton), *Voices in the Alleyway* and *Yes, I Still Exist* for Spread Expression Dance, Faith Drama's *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre) & *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), Chalkfoot's acclaimed *The Riddle of the Sands* and *Laurel & Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre, London & UK tours) as well as tours of *Queen Elizabeth's Elephant* and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, *Hansel & Gretel* (UK tour incl. Greenwich Theatre), *Stockholm* (BAC), and open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Railway Children* (Heartbreak Productions). Phil also designed the award-winning UK & international touring production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna* (Time Out Critics' Choice). Other productions in collaboration with Olusola Oyeleye include *The Security Guard*, *Ella* (RichMix), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *Coming Up For Air* (UK tour), *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice, London).

**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:**

**Feb 20:** Intrepid Theatre, Victoria, BC; **Feb 23:** Douglas College, New Westminster, BC. **Feb 24:** East Bay Center for Performing Arts, Richmond, CA; **Feb 26:** Claflin University, Orangeburg, SC;

**Feb 28, Mar 1:** Theatre on San Pedro Square, San Jose.

**March – July:** UK Tour; **August 16:** Gabriola Festival, Gabriola, BC

**Thanks to:** Darcy and Catherine Green and Family; George Sipos

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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