

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Michael Conliffe, Piano**

**Ashcroft Arts Centre, Fareham. Thursday, 25 October, 2012.**

**Greetings and Welcome.** It wasn't until we arrived here today that I realised that the Ashcroft Arts Centre was named after Dame Peggy Ashcroft, and opened by her in 1989, just two years before she died. Dame Peggy played Desdemona opposite Paul Robeson's Othello in London, in 1931, at the start of her acting career. Other details of their relationship are not as important as the fact that we stumble across and over history every day of our lives, but are often totally oblivious to it. That this performance is held during Black History Month is quite apt, though many people object to the very concept of setting aside a month in the year for Black History. The very fact that Europe enjoys the prosperity it does at such variance to the levels of poverty in Africa is a direct feature of the relationship between the two continents going back at least six centuries. Black History before that is almost always overlooked, and Paul Robeson is partly responsible for my own interest in the matter, since, despite growing up in Nigeria, the education system we inherited from the British didn't exactly give me the kind of knowledge of African history that I as an African would be proud of. It is quite remarkable that it took the dead son of an African-American ex-slave to give me the tools to embrace Africa with pride, and to understand a little better how the history shared between Europe and Africa is not quite as simple as we have been led to believe. Understanding that gives us a better chance of realising that the systems that created the inequalities between those two parts of the world also created the inequalities that persist right here in the UK, and will hopefully give us tools that will help us combat them. I plead ignorance to much of Dame Peggy's history, but thank her for her involvement with Paul Robeson way back when. I hope the knowledge that this centre and this play connects them both reinforces our determination to work together to create a fairer and more peaceful world for those following us. 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. A song from his CD, RECALLING ROBESON is featured as the July 2008 song of the month on the Labor Notes website.

### **Michael Conliffe, Piano and original incidental music**

Mike started playing piano by ear as child, playing gospel in church and later discovering Jazz, which he went on to study at Liverpool Community College and Leeds college of Music. As well as playing regularly in Jazz festivals round the UK, Mike has toured both coasts of America with Call Mr Robeson, culminating in the February 2012 performance at Carnegie Hall with Tayo. Mike also performs in another two-hander, a Jazz drama *God Bless the Child* about Billie Holliday, in which he also acts. He plays regularly as soloist and with Swing and Function bands at weddings, other celebrations and at corporate events. Mike also teaches piano to aspiring Pop, Blues and Jazz musicians and to singer/song writers.

**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 artistic director of Ariya, associate producer for Collective Artistes and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

**Phil Newman, Designer, Assistant Director and 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* (Edinburgh Fringe 2010 & Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice/Polka Theatre, 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:**

**October 26:** Forest Arts Centre, New Milton;

**November 15:** Claflin University, Orangeburg, South Carolina

**November 18:** Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester; **January 10:** Square Chapel, Halifax

**January 17:** Headgate Theatre, Colchester; **January 18:** Fisher Theatre, Bungay

**January 19:** Tristan Bates Theatre, London

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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