CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,
With Michael Conliffe, Piano
Baby Grand, Grand Opera House, Belfast
Monday, Tuesday, 14, 15 June 2010

Greetings and Welcome. We have just come from performing in Derry, and realised we were there at a particularly interesting time - just before the publication of the Saville Report into Bloody Sunday. In the Free Derry Museum, I was struck by the great similarities between the struggles there and the civil rights struggles in South Africa and in America, and of state brutality against its own citizens. Sure enough, one of the murals in Free Derry featured portraits of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, alongside Mother Theresa and - to my shame, I had to ask - John Hume. Paul Robeson will be similarly unfamiliar to many people from Northern Ireland today, but as I hope tonight's play will demonstrate, he deserves his own share of recognition in the civil rights struggle - not only in America, but all over the world. In fact, I am pretty sure he would have met and supported civil rights activists here in Belfast when he was here in 1958 and before. I have seen one magnificent mural of him on a 4-storey building in West Philadelphia, but for now, here in the UK, Call Mr. Robeson is one of the few memorials to him. With your help - through recommendations and other means, it will grow and grow - starting perhaps with a successful run at the forthcoming Edinburgh Fringe. His story, like those of Irish Freedom Fighters needs to be told to a new generation so that those lives and deaths would not have been in vain, and peace and justice can prevail. I hope that the Saville Report goes some way to bringing this about, and that we would have taken one more step up the ladder to the Promised Land. Enjoy.

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Tayo Aluko. Writer and Performer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now resides 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 also 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, Best Male Performer Award, and a nomination for the Best Show at the 2008 Brighton Festival Fringe. He has performed the play around the UK and to audiences on both coasts of the United States of America and Canada, and in Lagos, Nigeria. Tayo's other piece titled I GOT A HOME IN BARACK: 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 is now part of the permanent exhibit at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. His CD, RECALLING ROBESON is featured as the song of the month on the Labor Notes website in July 2008.

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. 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 Dramaturg Olusola is also Nigerian, resident in London. She has directed opera, music theatre, and dance in America, Ghana, Zimbabwe and all over the UK, at venues such as the *Royal Festival Hall*, English National Opera (where she was the first black staff director), RSC, Barbican Theatre and the Royal National Theatre. She was resident director on Trevor Nunn's West End production of George Gershwin's musical *Porgy and Bess*. Her production of The Playground at Polka Theatre was Time Out 'Pick of the Year' 2004. As a writer, her poetry has been set to music by Akin Euba and performed in the US and UK. She was the judge for the BBC World Service African Theatre competition 2007. Olusola is the executive director of Bush Boy Productions, an associate producer with Collective Artistes and artistic director of Ariya Opera. Her latest piece as producer/director was *High Life*, at the Hampstead Theatre, London.

Phil Newman, Designer & Assistant Director Phil's set and costume designs have featured in productions by companies such as Ladder to the Moon, Trestle Theatre, Chalkfoot Theatre Arts, London Shakespeare Workout, Rouge28 Theatre, Heartbreak Productions and Impetuous Kinship. He designed the internationally-acclaimed production of John Retallack's Hannah & Hanna (Time Out Critics Choice) which toured extensively in the UK and abroad between 2001 and 2005, The Playground (Time Out Critics Choice/Polka Theatre, London) and Victoria Evaristo's Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour (Oval House, London). Recent design credits include Stockholm (BAC, London), the acclaimed Laurel & Hardy (Jermyn Street Theatre, London), Yes, I Still Exist (Spread Expression Dance), High Life (Hampstead Theatre, London), Full House Theatre's national tour of Hansel and Gretel (incl. Greenwich Theatre), a new musical version of The Famous Five (Tabard Theatre, London), Xmas Reloaded (Old Red Lion Theatre, London) and Chalkfoot's The Riddle of the Sands at Jermyn Street. Future projects include the set design for Faith Drama's forthcoming production, Next Door.

Sound Design: David Darlington & Liam McDermott. **Lighting Design:** Gareth Starkey. **Sound Engineering:** Derek Murray. **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

Future Performances include:

July 29 - 31: Rich Mix, Bethnal Green, London

August 6 – 26: Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Zoo Southside)

October 13 – 15 Clwyd Theatr Cymru, Mold, North Wales

October 16: Wyeside Arts Centre, Builth Wells, Mid Wales

October 23: Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, South Wales

October 22: The Big Pit, Blaenavon, Wales (Schools Presentation)

October 23: Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, South Wales

November 3: Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

November 18: Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea

November 27: Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

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