

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Matthew Symonds, Piano

The Civic, Barnsley, Saturday 23 May, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. On the orders of their superiors, soldiers went into a chapel and murdered Archbishop Oscar Romero in front of his congregation in San Salvador in March 1980. The military authorities, who had, with backing from the United States, been terrorising its people for many years, took umbrage at a man speaking out publicly in defence of the poor and the weak in society. Thirty Five years later, he is being beatified in a ceremony in San Salvador today. This event once again reminds the world that the cynicism with which the United States is viewed when it continues to describe itself as the world's premier arbiter of democracy is decades old, and that surely, even those who continue to parade the world's stages preaching peace know that they are fooling only fools. My research reveals that Romero was inspired to be more radical and brave than he had ever been when an openly Marxist colleague of his was murdered for organising self-reliance groups among the poor of San Salvador. It reminded me of the new film I watched two days ago titled *We Are Many*, which chronicled the February 15, 2013 worldwide protests against war in Iraq, which, while unsuccessful in preventing that war, inspired millions around the world to become radical, and encouraged them to dream that each and every one of them could play a part in bringing about revolutionary change. What the documentary showed was how those protests would eventually lead to the toppling, by non-violent means, of some of the most feared dictators in the Middle East a decade later. One can bemoan the fact that the terrorism that afflicts the Middle East right now can be traced back to the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and/or to the continuing policy of arming repressive regimes of all religious persuasions in the area. On the other hand, one could take inspiration from the actions of millions of ordinary people who continue to follow their conscience and act in the belief that however slow the results may come, their actions will one day be successful in overcoming injustice and evil. Paul Robeson was always at pains to acknowledge the crucial role of people who went before him, and considered it his duty to continue their work, notwithstanding the personal cost. As we ourselves enter the battlefield of the next few years with governments around the world who are seemingly more interested in championing the rich over the poor, perhaps many of us will also accept that we should not moan or mourn, but organise and play our part in the continuing struggle, for we are many, and they are few. 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.

Matthew Symonds, Piano

Matt graduated with a music degree from the University of Sheffield in 2013 and has since gone on to work locally as a performer and educator. He works extensively across Yorkshire as a Musical Director and pianist and is never very far from a theatre.

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:

- August 7:** Threlkeld Village Hall, Cumbria
- August 8:** Lower Holker Village Hall, Cark, Cumbria;
- October 3:** The Brindley, Runcorn;
- October 17:** Paul Robeson Theatre, Hounslow;
- October 24:** Swindon Arts Centre;
- 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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