

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Michael Conliffe, Piano  
Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal, Bath. Thursday, Friday 12, 13 January 2012**

**Greetings and Welcome.** The Government's proposals to reform the welfare system were defeated in the House of Lords the other day, their Lordships and Ladyships using the term "indecent" to describe many of the plans for reducing the deficit. Democracy was at work – not just in the House, but also out on the streets, because there were people demonstrating outside, right up to their entrance into the chamber. Although they didn't make the news, small groups of people such as an organisation called Crossroads women – a marginalised and distrusted group who fight for the rights of women and children called for the parliamentarians to cut executives' pay and spending on war, rather than attack the vulnerable in society. Paul Robeson was marginalised in his time for speaking out on behalf of oppressed people all over the world: for decent wages for workers, freedom colonial peoples, for peace among nations. It is quite sobering to note that his voice would be very resonant today in 2012, and that we have too few people of his calibre prepared to risk their livelihoods and reputations for others. If he were around today, he would have joined those people outside the House of Lords, he would be with the people occupying St. Pauls, Wall Street and all those cities around the world, and of course on the streets and squares of the Arab countries where men and women, young and old have defied their governments and demanded and won change. Such change is being demanded in my home country Nigeria today, and one wonders if this is the start of what is termed a "West African Harmattan". Whether it is or not, Paul Robeson is with them in spirit, and I hope that his story inspires many of us here to join with all people who use their voices, their bodies, their brains in the cause of human rights, peace, justice, and fairness, wherever we are, in whatever way we can. I hope you enjoy show.