

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

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

**The Maltings, Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Saturday 30 March, 2013.**

**Greetings, and Welcome.** The end of March marks the end of Women's History Month. I am sure that women the world over have similar objections to those of Black people, dissatisfied at having the celebration of their ancestors' contributions to history concentrated into one solitary month of the year, but that's the way it is. I was reminded yesterday of a Black woman whose contribution to modern history has been rather overshadowed by more prominent figures. On March 2, 1955, a fifteen-year-old girl in Montgomery Alabama, who in February (that being their Black History Month) had been learning about African and African American History, was inspired to refuse to stand up and move to the back of a bus when asked to do so by the white driver. She was arrested and spent a part of that day in jail. A few years later, her case, along with that of four other black women, led to a landmark decision in the US Supreme Court declaring it unconstitutional for segregation to be practiced on Alabama's transportation system. Her name was not Rosa Parks, but Claudette Colvin. The actions of young Miss Colvin and the other women paved the way for Rosa Parks's own action nine months later, which sparked off the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and in turn launched the career of Martin Luther King, Jnr. History is incomplete when names like Dr. King's overshadow that of Paul Robeson, who undoubtedly paved the way for his more famous colleague, in the same way as Miss Colvin has become overshadowed by Rosa Parks. As Miss Colvin says, history can only have space for a few icons at any one time, but that must not stop the rest of us, female or male, teenage or adult, taking actions that are necessary to change the world and make it better, whether we get proper recognition or not. I am sure Berwick has her share of great, inspiring women whose past actions are worthy of note and research, as do countless African women in all parts of the world. Let us honour them by uncovering their stories and continuing the fights that they fought so that we can enjoy the freedoms we enjoy today, and remember that if we do not, hard times could be around the corner, for us and for our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. 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 frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in British concert halls, 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 15-minute play, HALF MOON, which also deals with ancient Africa has been performed several times in the UK.

**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. 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 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:**

**April 5, Henley on Thames:** The Kenton Theatre; **April 6,** Bolton Octagon; **April 24, Grantham:** Guildhall Arts Centre; **April 25: Stafford** Gatehouse; **April 26: Ilkley** Playhouse; **May 18: Doncaster** Little Theatre; **May 29-31 and June 2: Stratford-upon-Avon** Fringe Festival; **June 28: Lymm Festival;** **August: USA/Canada tour;** **September 11, Southport:** The Atkinson; **September 13: Braintree** Arts Centre; **September 14, Shrewsbury:** Theatre Severn; **October 1 – 26, London:** Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden.

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