

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Jonathan Ellis, Piano

The Met, Bury. Thursday, March 13, 2014

Greetings, Welcome. “I am a communist socialist” said Bob Crowe with neither apology nor hesitation in the last radio interview he did before his sudden death on Tuesday. Those lining up to pay tribute to him included, bizzarely, the Mayor of London and the leader of UKIP. Crow was admired and respected as the most effective trade union leader for doing exactly what his job required of him: winning good pay, conditions and pensions for his members. Yet in the eyes of the media and mainstream politicians he was portrayed as an obstructive dinosaur of the left. In the space of a week when we have seen a banking chief executive walk out of his job partly for details of his £3.5m salary being leaked and public sector workers being told that they should be grateful for a job at all and for a 1% increase in their own salaries, it is easy to understand why workers and trade unionists see Crow’s death as a profound loss, and a tragedy for working people. When he addressed my *Paul Robeson Art Is A Weapon Festival* in London last October, he mentioned his opposition to the European Union, not for the multiple (often xenophobic) reasons that Euro sceptics generally give, but because he saw it as a grand plan for the European and global elites to ensure that as many European workers as possible can be turned into a source of cheap labour for them to exploit as they do the vast majority of the world’s workers. Some see this as the real reason behind the conflict between the EU and Russia in Ukraine, but their voices are not being heard as world leaders command the airwaves. Unpopular voices like theirs and like Bob Crow’s echo those of people like Paul Robeson, who suffered his share of gross misrepresentation and vilification for standing up for civil rights, peace, justice and workers’ rights in his time. Men like Paul and Bob are too few and far between in my opinion, but one hopes that the culture of the RMT is such that at such a time of crisis for them, “Come the moment, come the (wo)man”. As the right wing and transport bosses secretly rub their hands with glee and look forward to attacking the workers, Bob Crow and Paul Robeson would urge the workers to roll up their sleeves and live up to the words of Joe Hill: “Don’t mourn for me, organise!” I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer. 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 British concert halls, and has also performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as *Nabucco*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *Anything Goes*. *CALL MR ROBESON* won the Best Musical Show award at the Atlantic Fringe in Halifax, Nova Scotia and the Best Solo Show at the Stratford Fringe in 2013, three awards at the London Ontario Fringe in June 2012, and the Argus Angel Award for Artistic Excellence and Best Male Performer Award at the 2008 Brighton Festival Fringe. He has performed the play around the UK, the United States of America, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, and at New York’s Carnegie Hall in February 2012 on his 50th 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. He has recently been appointed president of the Birmingham Clarion Singers. He is currently working with The Maltings Theatre, Berwick on a new piece, titled *What Happens?* featuring the writings of Langston Hughes, to be performed with live jazz accompaniment. He is a current writer on attachment with the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse theatres.

Jonathan Ellis, Piano and original incidental music.

Jonathan Ellis started learning the piano at the age of three. From the age of 11 onwards, he studied at Wells Cathedral School, and then moved on to the joint music course of the RNCM and Manchester University. He achieved a first class degree from both institutions plus the PPRNCM diploma in solo piano, and has since attained postgraduate-level diplomas in accompaniment and chamber music, latterly studying with John Wilson. During his time at college, he was to win many prizes as an accompanist, plus the RNCM’s two major chamber music prizes with his trio, and its annual Beethoven competition as a solo pianist. This latter success qualified him to enter the Intercollegiate Beethoven Piano Competition in London, at which he won the Audience Prize. He currently performs regularly as a soloist, as chamber musician with The Ryebank Trio, as vocal and instrumental accompanist, and choral/operatic repetiteur, and is a regular competitor in international piano competitions: besides being a regular accompanist for City of Manchester Opera, Bury Choral Society and the Pennine Spring Music Festival, with whom he also recently performed Mendelssohn’s Piano Concerto in G minor and Durufle’s Requiem Mass.

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. 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: **March 21, Newtown, Wales:** Theatr Hafren; **April 12, Sheffield:** *Paul Robeson - The Giant, in a Nutshell.* Millennium Hall; **May 1, Preston:** *Paul Robeson - The Giant, in a Nutshell.* The Continental; **May 4, Lowestoft :** Seagull Theatre; **May 10, Goole:** Junction; **May 29, Derry:** Playhouse; **May 30, Lisburn:** ISLAND Arts Centre; **May 31, Donaghmore:** Bardic Theatre; **June 1, Downpatrick:** Down Arts Centre; **June 25:** Ashbourne Festival

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