

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,

With Michael Conliffe, Piano

The Met, Bury, 26 January 2011

Greetings. I received an email from a Chinese gentleman who attended a recent performance of Call Mr. Robeson with his fourteen-year-old daughter in London, saying that our telling of Robeson's story had succeeded where he and his wife had failed, in persuading her to read history for her GCSEs. He also said that he remembered while watching the play how popular Paul had been in the China of his youth, and how the Chinese had had a special name for this African American who was one of the few notable friends China had in the 1930s and 40s. China today enjoys a much different status in the world today, and is perhaps not so desperate for friends as she used to be back in Robeson's time. The rest of the world has changed too: in some ways for the better, but in many ways, the injustices and inequalities that Robeson spoke out against in his time remain, or have intensified. As the young Chinese woman pursues her historical studies, one hopes that she will be inspired to seek out and discover other figures who, like Robeson, fought heroic battles on behalf of the poor and dispossessed, but have been wiped out from history. I also hope that she – and the rest of us – are inspired to do whatever we can to continue to battle for peace and justice, both here in the UK and in the rest of the world. I hope you enjoy the play.