

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Roland Perrin, Piano

CLF Art Café, Peckham, London. Thursday, October 1, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. A rare, non-commercial recording exists of Paul Robeson singing a song called *Little Girl of Hiroshima*, telling the story of that historic world event from the point of view of one of the millions of innocent victims in a very compelling, intensely personal way. “*My flesh was seared from every bone...*” As we sit here today, we know that similar horrors continue to be endured around the world – not with nuclear weapons, but ballistic and chemical ones that form such a ubiquitous part of the sick daily reality of modern society. It is striking that in the discussion of the current European refugee crisis, there is little talk of part of the solution being the minimization of war and the arms trade. When Jeremy Corbyn said yesterday that were he to be Prime Minister he would not press the button to trigger a nuclear war, rather than being lauded as a peace activist, he was turned upon – not just by the right-wing corporate media but even by members of his own shadow cabinet! Robeson, as this play illustrates, suffered similar criticism from all quarters in his own day for delivering messages of peace, freedom, equality and the brotherhood of man - particularly between the USA and the Soviet Union. More than half a century later, we see the same infantile posturing between two superpowers causing death and destruction in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and elsewhere, so voices like Robeson’s are still needed as urgently as ever. They do exist, but many are languishing behind bars in so-called democratic states. With the emergence of people like Jeremy Corbyn (and also Bernie Sanders in the USA) one gets the feeling that the political landscape is still capable of being changed. One of the reasons why Robeson was seen as so dangerous in his time was his way of reaching directly to masses of people with his words and music, to remind them of how much power they held in their own hands, and how politicians could and should be made to bow to the will of ordinary peace-loving people who want to make a decent living doing an honest job. I hope Robeson’s story inspires us to continue our part in the struggle for a better world, using whatever weapons we have at our disposal. 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.

Roland Perrin, Piano. Born in New York, pianist Roland Perrin spent his childhood roaming the planet with his itinerant family. Eventually settling in London, Roland has established himself as one of the foremost musicians working in the jazz and world music areas. He has toured and recorded with Dudu Pukwana, Najma Aktar, Moses Fan-Fan, Aster Aweke and many others including his own “Blue Planet Orchestra”. He recently had a major work for choir, jazz band, solo singer and narrator, commissioned by Crouch End Festival Chorus, titled *Lansky, The Mob’s Money Man* premiered at the Southbank Centre in London. That work is now being prepared for future performances in his native New York and other parts of the USA.

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 Design credits include: *Saint/Jeanne* and *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *Hairspray*, *Cabaret & Attempts on her Life* (Amersham & Wycombe College), *Lord of the Flies & Grimm Tales* (Colet Court School), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *The Wizard of Oz*, *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*. His Set Design credits include *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Other collaborations with director 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 tour of *Kwaidan*, a Japanese ghost story with puppets.

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:

October 2: CLF Art Café, Peckham, London; **October 3:** The Brindley, Runcorn;
October 7 – 10: Alphabetti Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne; **October 16:** Seven Arts, Leeds;
October 17: Paul Robeson Theatre, Hounslow; **October 24:** Swindon Arts Centre;
October 25: Redgrave Theatre, Bristol; **October 28:** The Witham, Barnard Castle;
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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