

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.
Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,
With Dr. Gregory Thompson, Piano
Booth Theatre, Blumenthal Performing Arts Centre, Charlotte, NC
Saturday March 6, 2010

Greetings and Welcome. I have recently had the honour of being installed as *The 2010 Africana Artist in Residence* at University of North Carolina, Charlotte (UNCC), where I made a presentation to a class of students a few days ago. I opened that session with the simple question, “How many of you admit to knowing nothing about Paul Robeson?” I wasn’t surprised that the vast majority didn’t, and these were mostly presumably privileged African Americans. I learned about Robeson even later in my life than most of those students, so I cannot pass adverse judgement on them. It was however a timely reminder to me about how effectively one of the most remarkable human beings of the 20th century has been wiped from history. Discovering him changed my life, and has led me on a most interesting journey, with the Booth Theatre being one of the more memorable stops. I thoroughly enjoy sharing his story with young people like those at UNCC, and hope that in the same way that my life has been given a new meaning as a story teller, at least some of them might also come to a new understanding of how the privilege that they enjoy (thanks to the toil and suffering of many who went before) can be used – as Robeson said of his art - as a weapon in the fight for freedom and justice.

Thanks to:

My big brother, Dr. Akinyele Aluko, (“de Big Wheel”) who got the other big wheels in motion for his little brother, the little wheel. To Dr. Shirley Houston-Aluko, to Prof. Akin Ogunrinde and Deanne Jenkins at UNCC Africana Studies Department, to David Taylor, Patrick Diamond and Carolyn Mints at the Harvey B Gantt Centre, to Fox TV Charlotte, Michael Collins on Charlotte Talks, Tonya Rivens at WGIV, Holly A Cooper