

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,

With Michael Conliffe, Piano

Big Classical, Cheltenham College

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Greetings and Welcome. I found out last night that Cheltenham College has always had a military and civil service background, and that hundreds of young Englishmen were sent from here from the mid 19th Century onwards to colonise and “administer” countries like mine – Nigeria. Still, I come in peace, to present to you the inspiring story of an almost forgotten African American who researched and celebrated his ancestors’ proud histories. He also sought to use his art as a weapon to fight for peace, justice and brotherhood among all people, regardless of the colour of their skin or the deeds of their ancestors. What mattered most to him was that people should join together to make the world a better place, in whatever way they could. Sadly, vested interests in his home country of America and also here in the UK (probably some Old Cheltonians among them) did their best to discredit and sabotage him, with some success. We live in different times now, but justice and peace in the world remain almost as elusive as in Robeson’s time. This need not be the case, and every generation can do better than their predecessors. Some current Cheltonians will grow up to become quite powerful and influential people in the future, and I hope that Paul Robeson’s story will stick in your minds, and help you promote peace and brotherhood and justice in the world, in whatever way you can. Enjoy.

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