

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,

With Roland Perrin, Piano

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Greetings and Welcome. It has just been announced that the US troops will be withdrawing from Afghanistan over the next couple of years. Presumably the British and others will follow. Mission accomplished, in other words. Where have we heard that expression before? Iraq, of course. And we will wait to hear in a number of months (if not years) the same thing said about Libya, and anywhere else our leaders tell us that military might will need to be exerted on our behalf (or is it on behalf of others' democracy?) in other parts of the world. With that military might goes the horrific injury and death of civilians and military personnel on all sides, the destruction of the environment, property, infrastructure and livelihoods. And most, if not all of that weaponry, regardless of who uses it, is manufactured in and sold from the West, in the name of trade, and even aid. When voices speak out against all this, they are labelled naive at best, or unpatriotic at worst. This was the case with Paul Robeson, whose story we are sharing today. Despite the passage of time however, his story has much to teach us today – that we should lend our voices and actions to those who call for an end to all this, and threaten to withdraw their labour if vital resources are not diverted from war to caring, teaching and serving at home. This may be going against the grain, and requiring great bravery, but we can all be surprised at how brave we all can be, when really important issues are at stake.