

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Michael Conliffe, Piano
Customs House Theatre, South Shields, Thursday 28 March, 2013.**

Greetings, and Welcome. A small strike occurred today, by members of two trade unions in the BBC, fighting for better wages and conditions. As a result, many of the usual programmes have been off air since midday. It will be interesting to see how much longer their cause remains in public consciousness. One more regularly hears about other public service workers going on strike – teachers, nurses, transport workers, and, as people round these parts know full well, dockers and coal miners. The role of the media during strikes is crucial, and it is a common complaint that the workers' side of the story is seldom accurately or sympathetically portrayed. Most of the time, the media and their bosses focus on the violence that is provoked, and the inconvenience that the rest of society has to suffer as a result of strike action. The fact remains that wherever workers go on strike, they depend on the solidarity of other workers and the general public. The ANC recognized this during their struggle against apartheid, and the South African trade union movement became a model for others to follow, by enlisting worldwide support, and bringing down that evil regime. Central to that struggle, even from within his prison cell, was Nelson Mandela, and it is a measure of his stature that the striking BBC workers say that they will only call off their strike prematurely if his condition takes a dramatic turn for the worse today. His place in history is assured, and it is my contention that Paul Robeson deserves similar recognition for his part in both the South African and other struggles. In his time however, the media colluded with the establishment to ensure that he was silenced. He however persevered with what he knew and felt was right, and the time has come for his story to be given as much air time as possible, without media bias. That story is as inspiring as any there is, and will hopefully help us recognize that whatever inconvenience the rest of the population may have to put up with during any strikes that come up here, it is nothing as compared with what others are going through around the world, be it in Africa, China, Palestine or even in other European States like Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy – the list goes on, and may well come to include Great Britain, unless we support the workers. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool. He worked until recently as an architect and property developer, with a special but frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in British concert halls, and has also sung in Germany, Ireland and Nigeria. He has performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as Nabucco, Kiss Me Kate and Anything Goes. CALL MR ROBESON won the Argus Angel Award for Artistic Excellence and Best Male Performer Award at the 2008 Brighton Festival Fringe, two Merit Awards for Excellence in London in 2010 and three awards at the London Ontario Fringe last June. He has performed the play around the UK, the United States of America, Canada and Nigeria, and at New York's Carnegie Hall in February 2012 for his 50th birthday. His other piece titled FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE - a talk about Black Political Resistance, illustrated with Spirituals has also 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.

Michael Conliffe, Piano and original incidental music.

Mike started playing piano by ear as child, playing gospel in church and later discovering Jazz, which he went on to study at Liverpool Community College and Leeds college of Music. As well as playing regularly in Jazz festivals round the UK, Mike has toured both coasts of America with Call Mr Robeson, culminating in the February 2012 performance at Carnegie Hall with Tayo. Mike also performs in another two-hander, a Jazz drama *God Bless the Child* about Billie Holliday. He plays regularly as soloist and with Swing and Function bands at weddings, other celebrations and at corporate events. Mike also teaches piano to aspiring Pop, Blues and Jazz musicians and to singer/song writers.

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, Assistant Dramaturge. Phil's Set & Costume Designs have featured in productions by companies as diverse as Ladder to the Moon, Trestle, Ariya, Full House Theatre, London Shakespeare Workout, Rouge28 Theatre and Impetuous Kinship. Recent design credits include: *Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink Productions), *Dance or Die* (contemporary dance performance choreographed by Avant Garde's Tony Adigun), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton), *Voices in the Alleyway* and *Yes, I Still Exist* for Spread Expression Dance, Faith Drama's *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre) & *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), Chalkfoot's acclaimed *The Riddle of the Sands* and *Laurel & Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre, London & UK tours) as well as tours of *Queen Elizabeth's Elephant* and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, *Hansel & Gretel* (UK tour incl. Greenwich Theatre), *Stockholm* (BAC), and open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Railway Children* (Heartbreak Productions). Phil also designed the award-winning UK & international touring production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna* (Time Out Critics' Choice). Other productions in collaboration with Olusola Oyeleye include *The Security Guard*, *Ella* (RichMix), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *Coming Up For Air* (UK tour), *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice, London).

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:

March 29: Alnwick, The Playhouse; **March 30, Berwick-upon-Tweed:** The Maltings; **April 5, Henley on Thames:** The Kenton Theatre; **April 6,** Bolton Octagon; **April 24, Grantham:** Guildhall Arts Centre; **April 25: Stafford** Gatehouse; **April 26: Ilkley** Playhouse; **May 18: Doncaster** Little Theatre; **May 29-31 and June 2: Stratford-upon-Avon** Fringe Festival; **June 28: Lymm Festival;** **August: USA/Canada** tour; **September 11, Southport:** The Atkinson; **September 13: Braintree** Arts Centre; **September 14, Shrewsbury:** Theatre Severn; **October 1 – 26, London:** Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden.

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