

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Evelyn Simpson-Curenton, Piano
DC Black Theatre Festival 2012 at Arena Stage, June 28 – July 1, 2012.**

Greetings and Welcome. Earlier this week, I attended a screening hosted by a small DC-based organisation, **TransAfrica**, of a documentary *La Toma*, telling the story of Columbian communities living in a mountainous area rich in gold deposits. The live on small-scale mining of this gold, in sustainable ways passed down to them by their ancestors. Now, with the apparent encouragement of the American government, the Columbian government has sold mining concessions to Canadian and American companies who plan to forcibly remove the communities and literally flatten the mountains to reach the billions worth of gold below. This is a story that would have interested Paul Robeson, not just because the occupants are Afro-Columbian descendants of runaway slaves (as his own was) who founded this community in 1636, but also because it is an extension of the rape and pillage of Africa that he was so vocal about in his day, and which of course, continues to this day. Robeson was instrumental in the 1937 founding of the Council on African Affairs to highlight such issues and campaign for African independence and the end of apartheid. Branded a communist organisation, the CAA was persecuted like Robeson was, and eventually forced to close in 1955. Today, the rape of Mother Earth continues unabated, in the name of “growth”. Despite this, it is inspiring to know that organisations like **TransAfrica** exist, and continue the brave, urgent work of Robeson and the CAA, as do thousands of groups around the globe (and the Occupy Movement) that heroically fight for peace, justice, human rights and the environment. May we all join that fight in whichever way we can.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool, UK. He worked until recently as an architect and property developer, with a special but as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. As a baritone, he has sung as soloist in British concert halls accompanied by orchestra, 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, and two Merit Awards for Excellence in London in 2010. 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. A song from his CD, **RECALLING ROBESON** is featured as the July 2008 song of the month on the Labor Notes website.

Evelyn Simpson-Curenton, Piano and original incidental music

Mrs. Simpson-Curenton graduated from Temple University where she earned a Bachelors Degree in Music Education and Voice. She is a renowned composer, arranger, pianist, organist, vocalist, artistic director, lecturer, producer, and clinician. Her compositions and arrangements have been performed and recorded by leading orchestras and soloists from Duke Ellington to Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle. She contributed several of her hymn arrangements in the recently published “African American Heritage Hymnal,” a landmark documentation of interdenominational sacred songs ranging from pre-Civil War music to contemporary musical offerings. She is resident organist and pianist at Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, DC.



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 artistic director of Ariya, associate producer for Collective Artistes and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

Phil Newman, Designer, Assistant Director and 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* (Edinburgh Fringe 2010 & Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice/Polka Theatre, 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/Concurring Performances include:

June 30: "Baba Sunny" in rehearsed reading of new play, "Sunny Came Home" in DCBTF

August 26, 27: Greenbelt Festival, Cheltenham Race Course; **October 6:** Capstone Theatre, Liverpool;

October 13: Otley Courthouse; **October 22:** Hawth Theatre, Crawley; **October 24:** Arlington Arts Centre, Newbury; **October 25:** Ashcroft Arts Centre, Fareham; **October 27:** Forest Arts Centre, New Milton; **Nov. 18:** Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester; **Nov. 21:** Rhodes Arts Complex, Bishop's Stortford

Thanks to: Evelyn Simpson-Curenton, Eddie and Christopher Curenton for sharing their home with me, David Warr, Wellington Wilder, Sharon Parker, and to Glenn Alan, Andre Minkins and the rest of the DCBTF team.

These performances dedicated to the memory of ex-classmate Ibrahim Istifanus Mutahir, aka Samba, victim of the June 3 plane crash in Lagos, Nigeria. Rest in Peace, my brother.

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