

## **CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.**

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Scott Flanigan, Piano**

**The Playhouse, Derry, Thursday May 29, 2014**

**Greetings.** Religious extremism is one of the greatest threats to global security we have. On an almost daily basis, we see horrible atrocities committed in the name of God, by people who think that their actions demonstrate a closeness to the Almighty more special than is the case with others. The rest of us know that these people are misguided and dangerous, and don't remotely represent the real religions they profess to practice. Thanks to politicians, religious leaders and the media, "Islamic extremism" is used to tar innocent people with the same brush as the lunatics that do horrible things in the name of that particular religion. It would be irresponsible of us to forget how in recent history, the Western world went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, supposedly fighting an "axis of evil" identified by "very Christian" political leaders. Hundreds of thousands of innocents have died as a result, and that carnage continues today. Here in Northern Ireland, if the recent history of conflict between the two Christian communities had been forgotten, we received a stark reminder in the last few days of those terrible times when a local pastor referred to the religion of Islam in highly inflammatory and derogatory terms, and was then apparently backed up by the most senior politician in the land. Public debate on the subject in the media has been very heated, revealing some disturbing underlying attitudes, and terrible ignorance. The words "racism" and "bigotry" were bandied about in heated exchanges on TV and radio. Clearly, for the sake of good community relations, a lot of education about people of different faiths is required, and we thankfully have the gift of books, music and the arts to serve as weapons for our collective instruction. Paul Robeson demonstrated the effectiveness of these weapons brilliantly, but the his government thought it better to silence him and instead concentrate on the use of lethal weapons to pursue their international interests..Things haven't changed much since his time, and the last few days' events remind us that we need to make our leaders focus a lot less on militarism and much, much more on the arts and humanities. That is the way to get rid of the devil, for it resides in all of us, but we have better weapons at our disposal with which to defeat it. I hope you enjoy the show.

**Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer.** Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool. He worked previously as an architect and property developer, with a special but as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and has also performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as *Nabucco*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *Anything Goes*. *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, as well as highly favourable reviews in the press – most notably in the Guardian and on BBC Radio 4. He has toured the play around the UK, the United States of America, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, and at New York's Carnegie Hall in February 2012 on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. He also delivers a lecture/concert called *PAUL ROBESON – THE GIANT, IN A NUTSHELL*, and another one titled *FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE* - a talk about Black Political Resistance, illustrated with spirituals has 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. He has recently been appointed president of the Birmingham Clarion Singers. He is currently working with The Maltings Theatre, Berwick on a new piece, titled *What Happens?* featuring the writings of Langston Hughes, to be performed with live jazz accompaniment. He is a current writer on attachment with the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse theatres.

**Scott Flanigan, Piano and original incidental music.** Scott is one of the most in-demand keyboard players in the province as a jazz performer, composer and educator. Having started with the Ulster Youth Jazz Orchestra, Scott studied music at Queens University and has performed with Van Morrison, Linley Hamilton and Jean Toussaint. He will shortly be embarking on a Masters degree in jazz performance at Dublin Institute of Technology.

**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.** 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:** **May 30, Lisburn:** ISLAND Arts Centre; **May 31, Donaghmore:** Bardic Theatre; **June 1, Downpatrick:** Down Arts Centre; **June 25: Ashbourne** Festival; **June 26: What Happens?** (Tribute to Langston Hughes @ The Matlings, **Berwick-upon-Tweed**; **June 27: What Happens? @ Alnwick** Playhouse; **June 28: What Happens? @ Phoenix Theatre, Blyth**; **Sept 4, Aberdeen:** The Lemon Tree; **Sept 5, Stirling:** Tolbooth Theatre; **Sept 6, Bathgate:** Regal Theatre; **Sept 7, Whithorn:** Swallow Theatre; **Dec 3, Dublin:** Civic Theatre; **Dec 4, Blanchardstown:** Draiocht; **Dec 5, Kilkenny:** Watergate Arts Centre; **Dec 6, Limerick:** 69 O'Connell Street; **Dec 10, Waterford:** Garter Lane Arts Centre.

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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