

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Doug Balfour, Piano
Laura C Muir Performing Arts Centre, Douglas College,
New Westminister, British Columbia, Canada. Saturday, February 23, 2013.**

Greetings, and Welcome. I am sharing this stage tonight with a few criminals - or people the state would have labelled that way. They'll remain nameless, but I know of two who've been arrested and spent time in jail. They committed the same crime years ago as many other Canadians did last week outside the White House: causing public disorder by being part of a demonstration against environmental destruction. That makes them international criminals! Somebody crossed the border into Canada about four years ago, having committed yet another "crime" - refusing to return to Iraq to continue fighting what he had come to see as an unjust war against innocent people. Many who did that before Rodney Watson during the Vietnam War now enjoy Canadian citizenship, but it appears the current regime here are unwilling to grant him refuge, and would instead arrest and deport him from Vancouver to the US to face the fate that awaits him as a war "deserter" (others say "resister"). This Black History Month, it is poignant that Mr. Watson stands as a reminder of those who went before him, enduring incarceration, brutality and murder in their fight for other Black people (and by extension, all society) to enjoy relative freedom today. A reminder too, of the thousands who idle in prison today, not because of their criminality but because of the colour of their skins and the racist "injustice" systems that confine more African Americans in jail than they educate in colleges and universities. Or systems that caused figures like Nelson Mandela (and currently Mumia Abu-Jamal in Pennsylvania, the Angola 3 and others) decades of separation from their families, for demanding a better deal for Africans in Africa, America and elsewhere. Paul Robeson suffered a different kind of incarceration, being placed under "house arrest", and prevented from travelling - even into Canada - because of his persistent and determined calls for peace, freedom and justice. The rest of us surely have a duty to honour and acknowledge their bravery by continuing to resist on the outside, bringing closer the day when victories won yesterday are repeated today and tomorrow. 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 fifteen-minute play, HALF MOON, which also deals with ancient Africa for a modern young audience has been performed several times in the UK.

Doug Balfour, Piano. Doug has been active in the classical, jazz and musical theatre worlds for over 30 years. Music direction credits across Canada include *Forever Plaid*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Don Messer's Jubilee*. Keyboard credits include *Wicked*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Ragtime* and *Sunset Boulevard*. He has played for many Arts Club productions in Vancouver, and recently composed the music for the drama *Intimate Apparel*. He re-opened the historic Stanley Theatre with the award-winning big band, Forever Swing, and scores music for classic silent movies.

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:

Feb 24: East Bay Center for Performing Arts, Richmond, CA;

Feb 26: Claflin University, Orangeburg, SC;

Feb 28, Mar 1: Theatre on San Pedro Square, San Jose.

March – July: UK Tour; **August 16:** Gabriola Festival, Gabriola, BC

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