

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Nicki Allan, Piano

Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond. Sat 28 March 2015

Greetings, Welcome. This theatre is, you will agree, one of the most striking theatrical spaces going. Being the oldest working theatre in the county (built in 1788) there is clearly a well of history here. The way my mind works, I wondered how many Black people have been on this stage. I wondered in particular how many would have been “paraded” as exhibits in the less enlightened centuries past - perhaps when slave traders sat in the very same boxes we see today. Today we are celebrating the story of one Black man who epitomises humanity in perhaps its highest form, but whose importance to the world was overlooked in his time, and this continues to be the case. That was because he decided to stray away from being a mere entertainer, and decided to draw people’s attention to the contradictions and hypocrisies of those who have influence over us: politicians and the media. It was telling a few days ago after the tragedy of the airplane crash in the Alps how the news repeated one phrase for a while: “His religion is not known.” Over the last decade and a bit, Muslims have become the target of suspicion and the blame for most of the ills in today’s society, while the real truth is the fact that our leaders don’t hesitate to start wars and kill thousands around the world, in a bid to control the world’s resources, or to perpetuate stark inequalities even in this part of the world, and blame immigrants for denying access to basics for all the indigenous population. Had the crash turned out to have been a terrorist attack, war might have been declared. Now that we understand that it was due to a terrible case of mental illness, it would have been great to hear leaders pledging to pour billions into mental and other health services. We are still waiting for that to be done in the fight against Ebola, but one can continue to live in hope. Back to the theatre of politics. Thanks to the continuing influence of Western élites pulling strings intercontinentally, many African countries have puppets dancing to their tune on the main stages of their political arenas (in my home country of Nigeria, I hope that we won’t have one after today’s election) but we need to find more people like Robeson who really show how Art can truly be a weapon in bringing light, truth and justice to the world. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. 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 USA, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, and at New York’s Carnegie Hall in February 2012 on his 50th 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 recently developed a piece titled *WHAT HAPPENS?* featuring the writings of African American Langston Hughes, for performance with live jazz accompaniment.

Nicki Allan, Piano. Nicki is a professional vocalist, pianist and educator whose career has taken her all over the world. She was JazzYorkshire Vocalist of the Year 2010. She currently teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and at Hull University. Previously she taught and ran gospel choirs at Leeds College of Music. She is a vocalist with the Manhattan Sound Big Band and can be seen doing solo piano solo vocal work around Yorkshire. She has recorded two successful albums with The Nicki Allan Sextet.

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. Phil's Set & Costume Design credits include: *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK & UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *A Christmas Carol & Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink), an open-air *Romeo & Juliet* (Cornucopia Theatre), *The Liar* (South Hill Park), *Dance or Die* (Hoxton Hall), *Voices in the Alleyway & Yes, I Still Exist* (Spread Expression Dance), *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre) and film short *The Judge* for Faith Drama, *The Riddle of the Sands & Laurel and Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), *Hansel & Gretel* (UK tour), *Stockholm* (BAC), open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice & The Railway Children* (Heartbreak) and the award-winning UK/international touring production of *Hannah & Hanna*. Set Design credits include *Houdini* (UK tour), *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Others with Olusola Oyeleye include *A Wing, A Prey, A Song* (Guest Projects Africa), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *The Security Guard* (Merton AbbeyFest 2012), *Ella* (RichMix), *Coming Up for Air* (UK tour), *The Playground* (Polka Theatre) and *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House/Edinburgh). He has just completed Set Design work on Rouge28Theatre's new puppet show *Kwaidan*.

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:

April 1, Liverpool: unity Theatre;

April 23, Abertillery: The Metropole; **April 24, 25, Newport:** The Riverfront;

May 2, Manchester: The Mechanics Institute; **May 16, Walton-upon-Thames:** Riverhouse Barn;

May 23: Barnsley Civic Hall

August 7: Threlkeld Village Hall, Cumbria

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