

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Nicholas Sykes, Piano**

**Junction, Goole, Saturday May 10, 2014**

**Greetings.** I have never hesitated to adopt an air of pride when stating the fact that I am Nigerian. That's a little more difficult today, with the news coming out of my country. Still, I think that probably more good than harm is being done by the total bankruptcy, illegitimacy and unfitness for purpose that our president and his inner circle are displaying for the whole world to see. If there's any justice, his campaign for a new four-year term in the 2015 elections will have been dealt a fatal blow. We however live in an unjust, greedy world, and what with the history of imperialism in Africa and those showing interest in Nigeria now, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Goodluck Jonathan may be victorious in 2015 (stranger things have happened!) While Nigerians are grateful for the help being offered to resolve the terrible, dangerous situation we find ourselves in (despite the fact that Security received by far the lion's share of our last national budget), the prospect of American, French, British and maybe even Chinese drones, troops and arms on the ground in that part of the world makes some suspect that humanitarian motives may soon be succeeded by (and are maybe masking) commercial and military ones. That is the stuff of international politics. One only has to think back to the Christian charity work that King Leopold II of Belgium professed to be doing in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Congo to understand why many African observers are feeling a little nervous right now. Paul Robeson once sent a telegram to President Truman in 1946 opining that "*Only when our government has taken ... action toward protecting its own citizens can its role in aiding the progress of peoples in other countries be viewed with trust and hope.*" Were he saying that today he would be no less correct, and no less unpopular with political elites and international business interests. Conditions are ripe for what some call a New Land Grab and Colonisation of Africa, but thanks to those like Robeson who had good reason to distrust governments and say so loud and clear, we can be reminded that it is not just a group of Nigerian girls that are at risk – we all are - if we don't constantly watch all our leaders very carefully, and hold them accountable for their actions towards providing peace, fairness, equality and justice, at home and abroad. 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.

**Nicholas Sykes, Piano and original incidental music.** Nicholas currently lives in Howden. Having retired from teaching two years ago after 33 years as Head of Music in the private sector, his last post being at Clock House School, the prep school for Bradford Grammar School. Nick now spends much of his time accompanying at music festivals and concerts, playing and conducting local choirs and music groups, including Snaith Choral Society.

**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 29, Derry:** Playhouse; **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

**Thanks to:** Nicholas Sykes and Dennis Hardy.

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**  
24- 26 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5RY Tel: 0151 707 8187  
[info@tayoalukoandfriends.com](mailto:info@tayoalukoandfriends.com) [www.callmrroberson.com](http://www.callmrroberson.com)  
**facebook:** Call Mr. Robeson **Twitter:** @CallMrRobeson

