

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Dennis Nelson, Piano

Lackland Center, Centenary College, Hackettstown, NJ. Friday, Nov 13, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. Delving deeper into the recent Missouri University strike, one finds that things started to really boil over after a Black student became president of the student body, and after a while used a Facebook posting to highlight racism and homophobia in the institution. The reaction to that posting by some in the majority population (likely objecting to an “uppity n****r” occupying such high office and refusing to remain silent) started a backlash that led to anti-racist protests which came to a head when the overwhelmingly Black football team decided to go on strike, and they were in turn supported by their coaches, and faculty and staff around the university. There is a compelling theory that the growing violent racism in society over the last few years that has led to the formation Black Lives Matter movement is similar to the reaction to the election and re-election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of this country. To win not one, but two elections to the presidency must surely be the ultimate in “uppitness” in the eyes of racists, but of course it’s nothing new. Paul Robeson’s travails were certainly partly a result of his being one of the most high-achieving Americans of all time. His living when he did certainly didn’t help his cause either, nor did his brave decision to use his fame to champion the cause of socialism. Last week’s protests (which are apparently spreading to campuses around the country, including Robeson’s alma mater, Rutgers University) have Robeson’s fingerprints all over them – from football excellence to the demonstration of the power and effectiveness of collective action across the racial divide. Despite the fact that he was born only fifty miles from here and remains one of New Jersey’s most famous sons, it is no surprise that many students at Centenary College or residents of Hackettstown remain oblivious to his name. Harder still to expect them to see that the footballers, students and all protesters are walking in his giant footsteps. Still, it is encouraging to note that when Black people continue to be thwarted in their daily lives in this country, a sleeping giant of just, powerful protest can still rise, Robeson-like, among us. 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 operas and musicals including *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. He has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana* and *Searchlight Magazine*. He is currently working on a new play.

Dennis A. Nelson, Piano. Dennis Nelson studied music at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and is a graduate of Hofstra University. He serves as organist and choir director for Trinity Baptist Church in Brooklyn, and accompanist for the New York City Labor Chorus, in addition to accompanying various soloists and choirs. He is also a member of The New Hope Ensemble, a gospel/jazz quintet, and Instrumental Sounds Of Praise (ISOP), a gospel big band aggregation. His songs have been recorded by noted gospel and R&B singers, and he has several recording credits as keyboardist and writer.

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 Design credits include: *Saint/Jeanne* and *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *Hairspray*, *Cabaret & Attempts on her Life* (Amersham & Wycombe College), *Lord of the Flies & Grimm Tales* (Colet Court School), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *The Wizard of Oz*, *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*. His Set Design credits include *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Other collaborations with director 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 tour of *Kwaidan*, a Japanese ghost story with puppets.

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:

Until Nov 15: Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey;

Nov 19 - 22: Bus Stop Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia; **January 9:** The Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal, Bath; **January 29:** Bolton Socialist Club; **February 25 - 28:** Anvil Theatre, New Westminster, BC, Canada; **March 17:** Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton; **March 26:** Derby Theatre

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