

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Darrius Willrich, Piano**

**Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, Seattle.**

**Friday, Saturday, February 8,9, 2013.**

**Greetings and Welcome.** I understand that a new movie about President Lincoln is in the running for best movie in the forthcoming Oscars. Central to the movie I believe, is the horsetrading and compromising that Lincoln had to do in order to get slavery abolished in the States. I haven't seen it, but I understand there are two things missing: one is the fact that he started off opposing the abolition of slavery in his earlier life. The other is that his conversion to "saintly great liberator" status owes a great deal to that great African American abolitionist and freedom fighter, Frederick Douglass. It won't surprise many that Douglass doesn't feature in a Hollywood epic. Yet. Neither does Paul Robeson. Yet. Robeson was always keen to tell the stories of Douglass and the other great ancestors who fought the fight that would eventually win their people freedom. And he openly supported those contemporaries of his who, like him, chose to speak and act for equality, peace and justice, almost always at great personal cost. People like that exist today, but they rarely get their stories told in any form, let alone in a movie. Not so with a documentary movie coming soon to a theatre near you. ***Long Distance Revolutionary*** is a story of Mumia Abu Jamal, a former Black Panther and broadcaster who was falsely accused and imprisoned for the murder of a white police officer in 1981. He's been in prison since then, only recently having been transferred from death row, where he was for about thirty years. The amazing thing about him is that he has continued to write and broadcast from behind bars, and enjoys a global reach to this day. His message is the same as Robeson's was – peace and love among people and nations, and exposing greed and corruption in positions of power and influence. Even though the movie hasn't a hope in hell of getting an Oscar, we would do well to see it when it comes to Seattle later this month, and be inspired to lend our bodies and minds to the continuing fight for peace and justice that those who went before started so bravely on our behalf. 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 as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. As a baritone, he has sung as soloist in British concert halls accompanied by orchestra, 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Darrius Willrich, Piano.** With a degree in jazz piano, Mr. Willrich is also a soulful singer and songwriter, with a love for hip-hop. He is recognised for his tuneful voice and his songwriting rich in sensitivity. He has many years of experience as an instrumentalist, sideman, leader, producer and recording artist, with three albums to his credit. In addition to playing all over the USA, his international touring has taken him to Australia and Brazil, where he enjoyed sell out audiences in June 2010.

**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 and 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* (Edinburgh Fringe 2010 & Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice/Polka Theatre, 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 10:** From Black Africa to the White House, at Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, Seattle;  
**Feb 16:** ArtSpring, Salt Spring Island, BC; **Feb 20:** Intrepid Theatre, Victoria, BC; **Feb 23:** Douglas College, New Westminster, BC. **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

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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