

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Scott Flanigan, Piano

ISLAND Arts Centre, Lisburn, Friday May 30, 2014

Greetings, Welcome. I performed in Derry last night, and not long after I had checked into my hotel after the show, a bomb went off - in another hotel, thankfully, but what a welcome to Northern Ireland for a peace-loving Nigerian! The incident brought home to us once more how vulnerable we all remain to the machinations of those who choose to make political or religious points with violence. In other parts of the world, including my home country, they have recently been sinking to a new low level with the indiscriminate nature of their barbaric acts. All in the name, they say, of religion. Right here in Northern Ireland however, religion may or may not have played a part in yesterday's bombing, but there is no doubt about what was at the root of the inflammatory condemnations of Islam by a Christian pastor a few days ago, subsequently backed up by your First Minister, an error (one hopes) for which he has since apologised. All this religious and racial conflict demonstrates a need for better education of people at all levels of society, and one of the most effective weapons in our armoury for this urgent task is the arts – music, poetry, fine art, dance, dialogue. If our leaders were to concentrate more on these than they do on making war, not only will there be more resources available for the arts, but also for the much more productive and necessary tasks of keeping people well, happy, inspired and loving towards each other and to the environment. Paul Robeson used his abundant gifts to contribute to these causes, but jealousy, greed and sheer evil led those in power to thwart his efforts and try to still his voice. That voice resonates strongly to this day, and in fact calls out even more urgently to those of us who are here to hear and listen. However modest our own voices and efforts may be in comparison to his, we can collectively move mountains and use our words and music to spread peace, love, understanding, brotherhood and sisterhood. 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 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 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.

Scott Flanigan, Piano and original incidental music. Scott is one of the most in-demand keyboard players in the province as a jazz performer, composer and educator. Having started with the Ulster Youth Jazz Orchestra, Scott studied music at Queens University and has performed with Van Morrison, Linley Hamilton and Jean Toussaint. He will shortly be embarking on a Masters degree in jazz performance at Dublin Institute of Technology.

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 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; **Dec 3, Dublin:** Civic Theatre; **Dec 4, Blanchardstown:** Draiocht; **Dec 5, Kilkenny:** Watergate Arts Centre; **Dec 6, Limerick:** 69 O'Connell Street; **Dec 10, Waterford:** Garter Lane Arts Centre.

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