

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Jonathan Ellis, Piano

Manchester Mechanics Institute, Saturday 2 May, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. A Black woman has recently been shown worldwide smacking her teenage son around the head and forcibly removing him from the violent protests against the killing of yet another Black man in Baltimore. She was widely praised for her swift and decisive action. Had the city's authorities initially acted in a similar manner in sanctioning the policemen involved in the murder, the riots would probably not have happened, with the result that the urban blight and the racial and economic injustices would not have been exposed to the world in the way that they have. Attempts to use the violence of the protests to divert attention away from the underlying issues have failed, and the dual evil of decades-long police brutality and economic violence by the system against the people remain uppermost in the consideration of many. Some pundits argue that two threats linger in the background that are worth paying attention to. One is the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) - a trade act which critics say would further transfer power, influence and profits to global corporations and create many more Baltimores in the USA and other countries in the partnership area. The other is the attempted assassination of Mumia Abu Jamal, a former Black Panther who as a popular radio journalist in Philadelphia used his voice to highlight police brutality against Black people, way back in the 1970s. He was framed for the murder of a white police officer in 1981, spent 30 years on death row, but international pressure and court action finally resulted in him being taken off death row in SCI Mahanoy, Pennsylvania and into the general prison population. His continuous broadcasting and writing in all that time, and fearless criticism of those in power around the world – a trait he shares with Paul Robeson - makes Abu Jamal very unpopular among several interest groups, so much so that right now the prison authorities, knowing that he is gravely ill, are wilfully denying him access to proper, specialist medical care, in the full knowledge that he may die. The authorities' attempt to keep his condition quiet is being resisted by thousands around the world, but should he die, the riots in Baltimore and other cities may well end up looking like a tea party. Saving Mumia is part and parcel of the struggle to save the working people of America and the the world – a struggle I invite you to join. 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. 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.

Jonathan Ellis, Piano and original incidental music. Jonathan studied music at RNCM and Manchester University. He achieved 1st class degrees from both institutions and has since attained postgraduate-level diplomas in accompaniment and chamber music. At college, he won many prizes as accompanist and solo pianist. He currently performs regularly as a soloist, as chamber musician, as vocal and instrumental accompanist, choral/operatic répétiteur. He is a regular accompanist for City of Manchester Opera, Bury Choral Society and the Pennine Spring Music Festival.

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:

May 16, Walton-upon-Thames: Riverhouse Barn; **May 23: Barnsley** Civic Hall

August 7: Threlkeld Village Hall, Cumbria; **October 24:** Swindon Arts Centre

Nov 7: Paramount Hudson Valley, Peekskill, New York;

Nov 12 - 15: Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey

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