

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Cornelia Rahdes , Piano

The Riverfront, Newport, Friday 24 April, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. There is what amounts to an underreported war going on in the USA. According to one report, a lynch mob was out in Baltimore ready to attack some people who were just out doing their job. The people “doing their job” were the police, who had killed a young Black man (yet another one) last week. This wasn’t the man that was shot in the back. Freddie Grey (whose crime was also running away from the police) had his neck broken. And the lynch mob, as described by the president of the city’s Fraternal Order of Police, were the large crowd of mainly Black people who gathered to peacefully protest this extra-judicial killing. If we can disbelieve the Baltimore FOP’s description of peaceful protesters, we can be as dubious about their description of someone else as a “cop-killer”. A brilliant African-American man (a present-day Robeson, just about) called Mumia Abu-Jamal has been in prison for over thirty years, framed for the murder of a white police officer in Philadelphia. His real crime at the time was using his platform as a brilliant broadcaster to highlight police brutality in 1970s Philadelphia. He has managed to continue broadcasting from within prison, much to the chagrin of the police and many others in authority (right up to the top of the political ladder). A listen to prisonradio.org will reveal why Mumia is considered so dangerous, and why the FOP and the Pennsylvania prison authorities want him dead. They seem to be getting close to having their wish fulfilled, for Mumia is dangerously ill in Mahanoy prison in Pennsylvania, and the authorities are wilfully denying him access to proper medical care. The fact that worldwide attention to his case resulted in him being taken off death row after about thirty years increased their hatred of him, but now, they want to hasten his demise by natural causes. As with Troy Davies a few years ago, and with so many who just happen to be driving- or running-while-Black, the authorities seem prepared to “kill first, ask questions later”. I find Mumia as inspiring as Paul Robeson, so the least I can do is draw attention to his plight, as his continued living to speak words of great wisdom increases our chances of achieving a fairer, safer world – more so than if we left it to politicians and other authorities. 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.

Cornelia Rahdes, Piano and original incidental music. Cornelia Rahdes was born in Schleswig, North Germany. She started playing the piano at the age of two, sat on her uncle’s lap. Cornelia was fascinated by music, finding in it a means of expression, even at such a tender age. She studied music and German literature at Bremen University., She now works as a psychotherapist, piano teacher and music therapist in Powys, and is also Music Director of the Talgarth Community Choir. She composes and improvises for her choir and her own piano recitals, working with spoken word artists and other instrumentalists.

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:

April 25, Newport: The Riverfront; **May 2, Manchester:** The Mechanics Institute;

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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