

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

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

**The Riverfront, Newport, Saturday 25 April, 2015**

**Greetings, Welcome.** I have a theory that Paul Robeson would be better known and celebrated today had he been assassinated, like Malcolm X and Dr. King were. In his biography, it is alleged that there were a number of attempts, but luckily they weren't successful. There is another brilliant African American man who, despite being known around the globe, is nowhere near as famous and celebrated as he ought to be. It is looking as though this may change pretty soon, because an attempt is being made to assassinate him, slowly but surely. Mumia Abu-Jamal has been in jail at Mahanoy SCI in Pennsylvania since 1986, after having been framed for the murder of a white police officer. His real crime was using his popular radio broadcasts to highlight police brutality in 1970s Philadelphia. He however retained his ability to speak truth to power, and address national and international issues even from within prison walls, through radio commentaries, books and articles, displaying in the process an intellect and humanity far superior to those who wish to see him silenced. The vast majority of his time in Mahanoy was spent on death row, until a few years ago, when international pressure over the decades forced the authorities to commute his sentence to life without parole. The international outcry was akin to the support that Robeson received when he was denied his passport in the 1950s, and to that received by Nelson Mandela during his own imprisonment. Now, such an outcry is needed again, as it seems an attempt is being made to kill Mumia through deliberate medical negligence. He is gravely ill in a woefully inadequate medical facility in prison, and repeated demands from around the world (including from Archbishop Tutu no less) for him to be granted specialist medical care outside the prison have been ignored. If they succeed, it is likely that this will become a very high profile assassination which will propel Mumia out of obscurity, and shine more light into the darkest corners of the American Justice system. It may also unleash great unrest in that country (as if there isn't enough there already) – such is the love with which he is held among his numerous supporters there and around the world. Visit [prisonradio.org](http://prisonradio.org) to listen to any of his broadcasts and see why he is considered so dangerous by some, so precious by others, and why he should be saved for humanity's sake.

**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 50<sup>th</sup> 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, and started playing piano at the age of two. 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:**

**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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