

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Michael Conliffe, Piano

Norwich Puppet Theatre, Sunday 30 October 2011

In conjunction with Norwich Stop the War Coalition

Greetings and Welcome. The Bishop of London says he hopes there'll be no violence if the protesters outside St. Paul's Cathedral have to be forcibly removed. It is at least encouraging that their protest, which started almost unnoticed a fortnight ago, has finally made its way to the top of the news agenda. It is also interesting how the media are now concentrating on the nuisance value of the protesters, and the possibility of violence, rather than on what they are doing there in the first place. They are part of a growing movement which started, not at Wall Street (occupywallst.org) but in public squares in the Middle East, which led to the regime change of a type and scale that would have been unimaginable two years ago. Those seismic events came about because ordinary people decided to occupy the squares and stay put until their undemocratic leaders left. They didn't advocate violence, and in Egypt for example, it was the armed forces' refusal to use violence on the people that eventually led to the resignation of their dictator. This inspired the occupation of Wall Street (the financial centre of America and the world), and people are still there, refusing to move until the system that pours trillions of dollars into worldwide militarism, greed, injustice, corruption and environmental destruction is changed. The equivalent space in the United Kingdom is the London Stock Exchange, (occupylsx.org) though I believe the space immediately outside that building is privately owned and is being guarded by the police (our police!), hence the steps of St. Paul's. It was there that thousands gathered in October 1958 to hear Paul Robeson sing, as the church was full to capacity for that rare, historic concert. That was after he had finally won his 8-year-long battle against the American government to have his right to travel restored, because his calls for peace and justice in his time were termed un-American and dangerous. "Blessed are the Peacemakers" (to use a biblical phrase), and power to them (including Norwich Stop the War), because they can achieve amazing things, even if they are starved of resources and the oxygen of publicity. I hope you enjoy the show.