

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Ian Gerrard, Piano**

**Number 8 Community Arts Centre, Pershore. Saturday, September 20, 2014**

**Greetings, Welcome.** The Scots have recently undergone a historic process the repercussions of which we cannot fully understand or predict at present. I heard one commentator say in a recent interview, "I think I can hear the sound of the goalposts shifting," referring to promises made by the main parties' leaders to the people of Scotland in their efforts to persuade them to vote against Independence. Many on the Yes side warned at the time that the promises were merely a ruse, and are only surprised that the retractions seem to have started so soon after the event. If the accusation is valid, the party leaders are following in a great tradition. At the outset of World War II, millions of volunteer soldiers were recruited by Great Britain from their colonies partly on strength of the promises made in the Atlantic Charter signed by Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt in August 1941. In the document, it was stated that one of the purposes of the war was the restoration of self government to those deprived of it. Within months of its signing, Churchill was saying that the Charter didn't apply to British colonies after all, leaving many of their colonial subjects wondering what exactly they were fighting for. Independence eventually came to the vast majority of them, often at the expense of thousands, and sometimes millions of lives in the civil wars that preceded or followed their liberation struggles. Thankfully, that didn't happen in Scotland this time round, partly because the flow of armaments tends to be from this part of the world to other more currently troubled parts. The exception of course is the United States, where it is said that there are hundreds of millions of firearms in circulation among the general population. This makes the idea of one part of that nation seeking independence in this day and age very scary indeed. When Paul Robeson dared to suggest in the 1940s that his government should address the huge problems, injustices and inequalities in their own country before taking it upon themselves to police the rest of the world, he was called Un-American, but one wonders whether his thoughts are any less valid today, in the case of his country or this United Kingdom of ours. 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 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 is developing a new play titled *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* as writer on attachment with the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres. He has recently been appointed president of the Birmingham Clarion Singers.

### **Ian Gerrard, Piano and original incidental music.**

Ian is a freelance accompanist and conductor. He accompanies Pershore Choral Society and Pershore Town Choir and is often Musical Director for PODS at No8 (Chess last, Pickwick this and next year Carousel). He plays organ in local churches for weddings and funerals having been a past Organist and Choirmaster at Pershore Abbey.

**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: Sept 25, Bath:** American Museum (This Little Light); **Sept 27, Windsor :** The Firestation; **Sept 28, Broadstairs:** Sarah Thorne Theatre Company; **Oct 2, Diss:** Corn Hall; **Oct 3, Gt. Yarmouth:** St. George's Theatre; **Oct 4, Cambridge:** Mumford Theatre; **Oct 5, Borehamwood:** The Ark; **Oct 8, Peterborough:** Key Theatre; **Oct 9, Bedford:** The Place; **Oct 10, Chelmsford:** Cramphorn Theatre; **Oct 12, King's Lynn:** Arts Centre; **Oct 17, Bradford:** Alhambra Studio; **Oct 22, Doncaster:** Cast; **Oct 25, Enfield:** Dugdale Centre; **Oct 29, Nelson:** ACE Centre; **Oct 30, Oxford:** Old Fire Station; **Dec 3 – 10: Republic of Ireland Tour:** Dublin, Blanchardstown, Kilkenny, Limerick, Waterford.

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