

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

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

The Theatre at the Old Fire Station, Oxford. Thurs March 7, 2013.

Greetings, and Welcome. In the past few days, the media has been carrying the story of the death of another Latin American dictator. We are not talking of someone in the murderous mould of Pinochet in Chile or Nicaragua's Somoza who were darlings of the United States (and have their successors in places like Colombia today) but Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, whose death had been expected for several months. His crimes as reported included the suppression of dissent and press freedom, and running the Venezuelan economy into huge debt. I don't know how true this last charge is, but let's see what he did with his country's resources. He nationalised the oil industry and used its revenues to provide food, education, health care and housing for poor Venezuelans. Coming from an oil-rich country myself, I know that this is a rare thing indeed. The multinational companies and the elites have control of Nigeria's oil, and the poor don't seem to get anything like a fair share of the benefits. Chavez called the USA and other Western powers imperialists and war mongers, befriended Fidel Castro of Cuba and openly championed socialism. Not the kind of behaviour that would make him the favourite of the politicians and wealthy elites of the world, so many of them will rejoice at his passing. Others mourn however, because they saw in Chavez a beacon of hope in the prevailing wind of a rapacious world political and economic order, where wars are fought for oil, the global elite enrich themselves by all means - criminal and otherwise, get away with murder (literally) the gap between them and the poor widens, and they devastate the environment and the climate in the process. If Paul Robeson were around today, he would mourn the loss of Chavez too, from the unique standpoint of one who knows what it's like to have one's character besmirched by the capitalist media and their paymasters. He tried to show the world in his time that there must be a better way of organising things, and his story has inspired thousands. May the day come when that of Chavez will be properly researched and celebrated, warts and all. Robeson would remind us of the words of his own hero, Joe Hill, and apply them to Chavez. "Don't mourn for me, Organize!". Let us heed that call as best we can. *La Luta Continua!* I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool. He worked until recently as an architect and property developer, with a special but frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in British concert halls, and has also sung in Germany, Ireland and Nigeria. He has performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as Nabucco, Kiss Me Kate and Anything Goes. CALL MR ROBESON won the Argus Angel Award for Artistic Excellence and Best Male Performer Award at the 2008 Brighton Festival Fringe, two Merit Awards for Excellence in London in 2010 and three awards at the London Ontario Fringe last June. He has performed the play around the UK, the United States of America, Canada and Nigeria, and at New York's Carnegie Hall in February 2012 for his 50th birthday. His other piece titled FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE - a talk about Black Political Resistance, illustrated with Spirituals has also 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.

Michael Conliffe, Piano and original incidental music.

Mike started playing piano by ear as child, playing gospel in church and later discovering Jazz, which he went on to study at Liverpool Community College and Leeds college of Music. As well as playing regularly in Jazz festivals round the UK, Mike has toured both coasts of America with Call Mr Robeson, culminating in the February 2012 performance at Carnegie Hall with Tayo. Mike also performs in another two-hander, a Jazz drama *God Bless the Child* about Billie Holliday. He plays regularly as soloist and with Swing and Function bands at weddings, other celebrations and at corporate events. Mike also teaches piano to aspiring Pop, Blues and Jazz musicians and to singer/song writers.

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, Assistant Director, Assistant Dramaturge. Phil's Set & Costume Designs have featured in productions by companies as diverse as Ladder to the Moon, Trestle, Ariya, Full House Theatre, London Shakespeare Workout, Rouge28 Theatre and Impetuous Kinship. Recent design credits include: *Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink Productions), *Dance or Die* (contemporary dance performance choreographed by Avant Garde's Tony Adigun), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton), *Voices in the Alleyway* and *Yes, I Still Exist* for Spread Expression Dance, Faith Drama's *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre) & *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), Chalkfoot's acclaimed *The Riddle of the Sands* and *Laurel & Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre, London & UK tours) as well as tours of *Queen Elizabeth's Elephant* and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, *Hansel & Gretel* (UK tour incl. Greenwich Theatre), *Stockholm* (BAC), and open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Railway Children* (Heartbreak Productions). Phil also designed the award-winning UK & international touring production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna* (Time Out Critics' Choice). Other productions in collaboration with Olusola Oyeleye include *The Security Guard*, *Ella* (RichMix), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *Coming Up For Air* (UK tour), *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice, London).

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: March 22, Coventry: Belgrade Theatre; **March 27, Hexham:** Queen's Hall; **March 28, South Shields:** Customs House; **March 29: Alnwick,** The Playhouse; **March 30, Berwick-upon-Tweed:** The Maltings; **April 5, Henley on Thames:** The Kenton Theatre; **April 6, Bolton Octagon;** **April 24, Grantham:** Guildhall Arts Centre; **April 25:** Stafford Gatehouse; **April 26:** Ilkley Playhouse; **May 18:** Doncaster Little Theatre; **May 29-31 and June 2: Stratford-upon-Avon Fringe Festival,** Stratford-upon-Avon; **June 28: Lymm Festival**

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