

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Martin Pickett, Piano**

**Old Fire Station, Oxford, Thursday 30 October 2014.**

**Greetings, Welcome.** In June 1934, Paul Robeson made a speech in London in which he referred to his pleasure in being involved in “the greatest cause which faces the world today”, referring to the fight against fascism in Europe. Eighty years later, that cause remains one that demands our attention, and particularly so because the threat remains a lot less obvious than it did then. One only needs to go back to the history of that time to remember that Hitler was seen by many of his compatriots (though he wasn't “pure” German!) as a defender of the rights of the common man, against those that threatened the economy and well-being of their country. Today, our politicians are fighting among themselves to demonstrate their credentials as the most effective in stemming the tide of immigrants flowing into this country from all corners of the earth, diverting the population's attention from the real reasons why the economy is in the mess it's in today – the greed at the top of the financial industry, and the concentration of much-needed resources to the ridiculously expensive, wasteful and destructive occupation of warmongering. It is finally being recognised that perhaps the greatest threat to humanity today is Ebola, which demonstrates as clearly as anything else what Robeson argued in his time – that one cannot dismiss inequalities and injustices against our fellow human beings without endangering ourselves. When one ponders why so many people risk everything to reach these shores (and often make fine contributions once they have settled) it is worth considering how to improve the lot of the vast majority of the world so that their lives at home are so peaceful, prosperous and healthy that they are more than content to stay where they were. The small-island mentality that suggests the borders should be closed is divisive and dangerous, and must not distract us from paying our attention to the urgent task of eliminating inequalities within our country and between countries. 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.

### **Martin Pickett, Piano and original incidental music.**

Martin has been a freelance jazz pianist and teacher since 1998. He currently leads a quintet whose debut CD was released in 2011. He has recorded two other CDs as leader and has appeared on six others. He has acted as house pianist for many acclaimed soloists visiting the region including Art Theman, Julian Siegel, Alan Barnes, Adam Glasser, and Bobby Wellins. He studied music at Bristol University, with an emphasis on composition. This has continued to be an important part of his musical life and he has amassed a large portfolio of music for varying ensemble sizes.

**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:** **Nov 21, Abeokuta, Nigeria:** Aké Arts & Book Festival; **Nov 29, Manchester:** From Black Africa to the White House @ Z-Arts Theatre **Dec 3, Tallaght, Dublin:** Civic Theatre; **Dec 5, Kilkenny:** Watergate Arts Centre; **Dec 6, Limerick:** 69 O'Connell Street; **Dec 10, Waterford:** Garter Lane Arts Centre; **Jan 16, Spokane, Washington, USA:** Bing Crosby Theatre; **Feb 1, Buxton:** Pavilion Arts Centre; **Feb 20 - March 1, Wellington:** New Zealand Fringe Festival; **March 4 - 15, Australia:** Adelaide Fringe; **March 27, Millom, Cumbria:** Beggars Theatre; **March 28, Richmond, N. Yorkshire:** Georgian Theatre Royal; **April 1, Liverpool:** unity Theatre

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