

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Glen Pearson, Piano

Phoenix Theatre, San Francisco. Friday, February 1, 2013.

Greetings and Welcome. I believe a movie about one Mumia Abu Jamal opened today, and will be doing the rounds of the country and the world. This remarkable man has been in prison since 1981, despite overwhelming evidence that he was wrongfully convicted for the murder of a white police officer in Philadelphia. He however manages from within prison walls (including 29 years on death row) to communicate with millions around the world, through regular broadcasts via prionradio.org and numerous books. He is openly critical of existing power structures around the world and preaches a message of revolutionary change in society. That appears to be the real reason he has been incarcerated for so long – the fact that the things he says and writes challenge those in authority, and reveal truths that they would rather remained hidden. He is of course following in the giant footsteps of Paul Robeson, whose incarceration was not actual but professional. Robeson was denied freedom to travel and perform because he preached his own message of love, peace, justice and equality in word and song. One would have hoped that injustices of this kind would have been phased out with time, given the information at our fingertips today. Sadly, this seems not to be the case, as whistleblowers continue to wind up in jail for revealing information which appears to many to be to the public good, but which the authorities regard as treachery. The wonderful thing about some of these whistle blowers is that unlike most of us, they decide to take a stand and suffer the consequences, because they believe that what they are doing is right, and that despite imprisonment, truth keeps their minds and their souls free – freer than with most of us in so-called freedom. I know that Robeson's story as told through the medium of this play has touched and inspired dozens of people, and I am excited by the potential that the Mumia film has to inspire change in society. I urge everyone to see it, and hope that the film makers don't wind up in jail, for they too have done the state some service. 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 as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. As a baritone, he has sung as soloist in British concert halls accompanied by orchestra, 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. A song from his CD, RECALLING ROBESON is featured as the July 2008 song of the month on the Labor Notes website.

Glen Pearson, Piano. Mr. Pearson is currently head of music at the College of Alameda. He has worked on and off Broadway, and served as Musical/Band Director of the renowned Boys' Choir of Harlem for 11 years. He is well known for having been principal keyboardist for Regina Belle. Other notable artists he has worked with include Will Downing, James Moody, Gerald Albright, Gregory Hines and jazz vocalist Dima. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from San Francisco State University and a Master of Arts Degree from New York University. Additionally, he has been the recipient of several honors, including the prestigious Eubie Blake Memorial Scholarship Award. He enjoys great demand as pianist and orchestrator on recordings, TV, stage and radio.

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 and 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* (Edinburgh Fringe 2010 & Oval House Theatre) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice/Polka Theatre, 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:

Feb 6: Bing Crosby Theatre, Spokane, WA;

Feb 8, 9: Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, Seattle, WA; **Feb 10:** From Black Africa to the White House. At Langston Hughes Performing Arts Centre, Seattle; **Feb 16:** ArtSpring, Salt Spring Island, BC; **Feb 20:** Intrepid Theatre, Victoria, BC; **Feb 23:** Douglas College, New Westminster, BC. **Feb 24:** East Bay Center for Performing Arts, Richmond, CA; **Feb 26:** Claflin University, Orangeburg, SC; **Feb 28, Mar 1:** Theatre on San Pedro Square, San Jose.

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