

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

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

**Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham. Wednesday 27 March, 2013.**

**Greetings, and Welcome.** In Chinua Achebe's classic novel *Things Fall Apart*, a minor character is killed off barely halfway into the second page and forgotten. In his people's eyes, Unuka had little to recommend him. He wasn't manly, he hated war, didn't accumulate wealth but lived off others' generosity, and the only thing he was good at was the relatively unimportant skill of flute playing, and joining in musical celebrations at harvest time. The main character, Okonkwo however, was a *real* man – a successful and wealthy farmer, and a famous wrestler and warrior whose tragic end came as a result of his daring to confront the might of the British Empire bringing their brand of civilisation into his part of Africa. The novel ends with the colonial District Commissioner thinking that the whole sorry saga might merit a paragraph in a book he would write, titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* – an example of the arrogance of Empire that still lingers somewhat today. What also seems not to have changed much – in the West, Africa or wherever – is the way that militarism and monetarism seem to be the prevailing occupation of our leaders and too many of us. The arms trade is one of the most lucrative industries there is, despite the fact that we surely already have more than enough weapons on the planet already. One is however inspired by stories of guns being converted into furniture, works of art or even musical instruments. Whilst these activities seem to be like little flowers in the path of the juggernaut of the continued proliferation of the arms race, they remain an example of what could be, if we could re-examine our priorities in life. The noise of the war mongers and capitalists often drowns out the sweet, gentle melodies of the peace makers, but their notes never die completely. So it is with Paul Robeson, who though his voice was once loved worldwide, has almost been consigned to a mere footnote in history. His story and his music however remain there to be rediscovered, and their value as a useful weapon against the oppression of people around the world appreciated. And maybe one day, in fitting tribute to Chinua Achebe who died last week, another Nigerian writer may with justification write a book titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Weapon-Making Tribes of the World*. 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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 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;** **June 28: Lymm Festival;** **August: USA/Canada tour;** **September 11, Southport:** The Atkinson; **September 13: Braintree Arts Centre;** **September 14, Shrewsbury:** Theatre Severn; **October 1 – 26, London:** Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden.

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**  
24- 26 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5RY  
Tel: 0151 707 8187



info@tayoalukoandfriends.com www.callmrrobeson.com  
**facebook:** Call Mr. Robeson **Twitter:** @CallMrRobeson