

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko. With Nicki Allan, Piano

Seven Arts Centre, Leeds. Friday, October 16, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. How sad to hear of the Scottish nurse being critically ill with a re-emergence of Ebola in her system. We continue to pray for her, and for the thousands of nurses in the various parts of Africa whose heroic work must be remembered. Many of course died in the course of duty, and of those that remain, it would be wonderful to think that they too could have access to the kind of medical attention that has been made available to their counterpart in London. That of course is totally out of the question. Resources in that part of the world are so poor that most medical practitioners who have the wherewithal or desire come to these shores to ply their trade, propping up the NHS. It is almost certain that many of those administering to the Scottish nurse are African. They represent a sapping of Africa's natural resources for the benefit of the West that has been going on for centuries, and something that was at the top of the agenda in Manchester seventy years ago to the day, when the fifth Pan-African Congress was held, attended by such luminaries as W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore and Amy Ashwood-Garvey. A plaque on the spot today states the proceedings led to the liberation of African countries. That is no exaggeration, because those people did go on to lead liberation struggles and become leaders of independent nations. That is probably one reason why this event isn't featuring in the news today - stories of successful Black Resistance don't tend to receive such attention - even during Black History Month. Still, the stories are there to be told. Paul Robeson's is as remarkable a one as any, and it has been my absolute joy to discover it and share it around the world, and with you here today. He was portrayed as a dangerous revolutionary in his time, as were most of the people at that Pan African Congress, but it should be clear to us today that had the things they demanded then been conceded, things in Africa and the rest of the Black world would be very different, and we would not have the situation now where so many British nurses travel to Africa to help in dangerous situations where Africans could (if the world were fairer) be doing that work themselves. So, here we are again with politicians and the media portraying people calling for a fairer, more peaceful world as dangerous, irresponsible idealists. I talk of the new Labour leader and his thousands of admirers and supporters – of whom I am one) They represent another opportunity to achieve what Robeson and those Pan-Africanists called for. Let us give them a fair chance. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. 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 50th 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 has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana* and *Searchlight Magazine*. He is currently working on a new play.

Nicki Allan, Piano. Nicki is a professional vocalist, pianist and educator whose career has taken her all over the world. She was JazzYorkshire Vocalist of the Year 2010. She teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and at Hull University, and has taught and run gospel choirs at Leeds College of Music. She sings with the Manhattan Sound Big Band and does solo piano and solo vocal work around Yorkshire. She has recorded two successful albums with The Nicki Allan Sextet.

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. Phil's Set & Costume Design credits include: *Saint/Jeanne* and *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *Hairspray*, *Cabaret* & *Attempts on her Life* (Amersham & Wycombe College), *Lord of the Flies* & *Grimm Tales* (Colet Court School), *The Tempest* & *Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *The Wizard of Oz*, *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*. His Set Design credits include *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Other collaborations with director 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 tour of *Kwaidan*, a Japanese ghost story with puppets.

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:

October 17: Paul Robeson Theatre, Hounslow; **October 24:** Swindon Arts Centre;

October 25: Redgrave Theatre, Bristol; **October 28:** The Witham, Barnard Castle;

October 31: Teatro Technis, Camden, London;

Nov 7: Paramount Hudson Valley, Peekskill, New York;

Nov 12 - 15: Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey;

Nov 19 - 22: Bus Stop Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Feb 16, 2016: Theatre Royal, Bath.

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