

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Jason Collins, Piano**

**St. George's Theatre, Great Yarmouth, Friday October 3, 2014**

**Greetings, Welcome.** " I use my art as a weapon in defence of my people and all oppressed people." Those are words famously uttered by Paul Robeson, and thankfully there are many more like him (though still not nearly enough) who have the same philosophy. The Nigerian, Fela was on such, and he, like Robeson, was persecuted for his art. Here in Britain, the fine artist known as Banksy has done something similar in the last few days, and luckily for him, all he has suffered was the removal of his work by council officials in Clacton-on-Sea, down the coast in Essex. His piece ironically poked fun at anti-immigration sentiments prevalent in that part of the country as elsewhere, with grey pigeons demanding that a colourful swallow return to Africa, as immigrants are unwelcome. At best, we can accuse the council officers of a serious lack of humour, and at worst, we can fear the slow creep of our society toward fascism (the journey of a thousand miles starts with a first step). As we see from Robeson's story, he was like the proverbial canary in the coal mine warning of the approach of fascism to the world in his time, but he was dismissed as a paranoid communist. Many argue that times are ripe for fascism to re-emerge today, with inequalities widening, and the weak being blamed for all ills in society. Africans have been coming to Europe for centuries, bringing with them in many cases great creativity and enterprise. We will continue to do so, however unwelcome we may be, and many of us are coming because conditions in our home countries are getting worse, as they are here. There is now the added threat of Ebola, and that will undoubtedly increase fascistic cries when the first case emerges in this country (it's sadly only a matter of time). We can choose to see this as an opportunity to look afresh at ways of improving health and other social services in Africa (and here) or as another immigration problem. 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. He is developing a new play titled *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* as writer on attachment with the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres. He has recently been appointed president of the Birmingham Clarion Singers.

### **Jason Collins, Piano**

Jason is currently Manager at The Fisher Theatre in Bungay and it is wonderful to be working with Tayo here at St. George's Theatre. After moving to Norfolk in 2004 to study Music at UEA Jason had the privilege of being taught piano by Christopher Green Armitage and conducting by Sharon Choa. Whilst studying full-time he directed a number of choirs in Norfolk & Suffolk giving him great opportunities to be working with singers from Glyndebourne & The Royal Opera House on regular occasions.

**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:** **Oct 4, Cambridge:** Mumford Theatre; **Oct 5, Borehamwood:** The Ark; **Oct 8, Peterborough:** Key Theatre; **Oct 9, Bedford:** The Place; **Oct 10, Chelmsford:** Cramphorn Theatre; **Oct 12, King's Lynn:** Arts Centre; **Oct 17, Bradford:** Alhambra Studio; **Oct 22, Doncaster:** Cast; **Oct 25, Enfield:** Dugdale Centre; **Oct 29, Nelson:** ACE Centre; **Oct 30, Oxford:** Old Fire Station; **Dec 3, Tallaght, Dublin:** Civic Theatre; **Dec 4, Blanchardstown:** Draiocht; **Dec 5, Kilkenny:** Watergate Arts Centre; **Dec 6, Limerick:** 69 O'Connell Street; **Dec 10, Waterford:** Garter Lane Arts Centre.

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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