

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko. With Phil Blandford, Piano

Swindon Arts Centre. Saturday, October 24, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. There has been much talk recently about the human rights record of the Chinese government, what with the high profile visit of their Prime Minister to these shores last week. Most people agree that even as this government are accused of selling off British assets to the Chinese, they should have raised the issue with their leader more forcefully. Others point at times like these to the apparent blindness to the records of other regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, Israel and other Middle Eastern states, many of whom are great customers of this government – particularly when it comes to armaments and violent means of population control. It is interesting how a “holier-than-thou” attitude seems to pervade the air when these pundits pontificate. Great Britain after all is one of the freest and most democratic states in the world, is it not? Even those people will have to admit that this is by no means a perfect country. Furthermore, it was not so long ago (during the colonial era that mostly ended about half a century ago, but which still continues in some parts) that the British carried out countless major atrocities against innocent people whose land they had appropriated, resources they stole, and whose people were demanding freedom and self-governance. Exactly seventy years ago this month, over two hundred people from the Black diaspora gathered in Manchester for the fifth Pan-African Congress, to discuss ways of bringing the British Empire to an end, by violent means if necessary, as it was clear then that they wouldn’t be granted freedom easily. The promises made by Churchill and Roosevelt that self-determination would be granted in exchange for the colonials fighting for the Allies in WWII had been shown to be nothing short of deception, and some of the participants (Jomo Kenyatta is probably the best-known example) would later be imprisoned on trumped-up charges. Paul Robeson was an early supporter of these liberation struggles, but he also linked them to struggles for working people all over the world. He suffered terribly for his troubles, but left an impressive legacy that we try to celebrate today. It is incumbent on those of us who benefit today from the struggles of he and others like him that we continue those international struggles, keeping in mind that it is by ordinary people acting together that real change is brought about, not by politicians’ words. 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.

Phil Blandford, Piano. Phil holds a degree in Music from Bristol University and an Advanced Certificate from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. He regularly provides music for a variety of events in the South West, South Wales and further afield. He has developed a repertoire of hundreds of songs from the last hundred years or so. He is a regular accompanist for several local groups, including Bristol Opera, North Avon Youth Theatre Company and the Amadeus Choir. He also accompanies numerous professional singers and instrumentalists. He plays in several jazz bands of all traditions, specialising in the 1920s styles.

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 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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