

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

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Roland Perrin, Piano

Theatro Technis, London. Saturday, October 31, 2015

**Greetings, Welcome.** Fancy you coming out to see this show on a dark Halloween night - especially with all those zombies roaming the London streets! Another tradition from who-knows-where taken over by naked commercialism, with little knowledge or regard for its origins. 17<sup>th</sup> Century St. Domingue, which would become independent Haiti in 1804 after a successful slave revolution, saw slavery at absolutely its most brutal, with most being worked to death in probably a decade before being replaced by new Africans. Many committed suicide rather than continue the dismal life, in the hope that their souls would return to the Mother Continent. It was however feared that suicide might condemn them to eternity in their dead bodies, robbed of their minds and souls, roaming the plantations forever doing the bidding of their masters as the Living Dead. The Zombie Apocalypse movies that have grown out of these stories in the last few decades hardly refer to the slave origins, but are sometimes supposedly a metaphor for conditions under capitalism and environmental destruction today. The zombie contagion spreads as all but a tiny few good people decide to look out for themselves alone instead of concerning themselves for the common good. Most of those good people end up sacrificing their lives in the process. Paul Robeson certainly fits that description. He was himself a descendant of slaves, but saw how despite their emancipation in the USA, his people continued to remain second-class citizens, and workers all over the world continued in servitude to a tiny elite. The seeming addiction to war and the injustices and inequalities that seemed to get worse by the day made him cry out repeatedly for a different way of life. For his pains he was labelled a communist, anti-American, and a dangerous revolutionary. Notwithstanding the fact that he could have changed his tune to fit in with mainstream society, he decided to sacrifice himself for the common good. An inspiring story about which much has been written but also hidden, which I am delighted to share with you tonight. How apt that my next performance is in the town of Peekskill in New York State, where one of the seminal episodes of Robeson's career unfolded, and where I am to meet a man who wrote a book lamenting alleged continued racism in that town, titled *The Ghost Of Robeson*. 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 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 has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana* and *Searchlight Magazine*. He is currently working on a new play.

**Roland Perrin, Piano.** Born in New York, pianist Roland Perrin spent his childhood roaming the planet with his itinerant family. Eventually settling in London, Roland has established himself as one of the foremost musicians working in the jazz and world music areas. He has toured and recorded with Dudu Pukwana, Najma Aktar, Moses Fan-Fan, Aster Aweke and many others including his own "Blue Planet Orchestra". He recently had a major work for choir, jazz band, solo singer and narrator, commissioned by Crouch End Festival Chorus, titled *Lansky, The Mob's Money Man* premiered at the Southbank Centre in London. That work is now being prepared for future performances in his

native New York and other parts of the USA.

**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:**

**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  
**January 15:** Where are those WMDs? Cheese & Grain, Frome; **January 16:** The Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal, Bath); **January 29:** Bolton Socialist Club; **February 25 - 28:** Anvil Theatre, New Westminster, BC, Canada

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