

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

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

**Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden, London, Saturday January 19, 2013.**

**Greetings and Welcome.**..I went past the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on the way here today. It is humbling and inspiring to know that we are a stone's throw from where Paul Robeson was launched onto the world stage as an actor/singer. Inspiring also to know that the voices of a group of haggard men singing on one of the nearby streets in 1928 were responsible for launching Robeson on a trajectory that would see him become one of the world's earliest internationalists. Those Welsh miners presumably set off on their march from the valleys with high hopes that someone would hear their voices and do something about their plight. Their voices helped Robeson to also tune into the voices of people of all nations, and especially those in his ancestral home of Africa, long before most people (even African Americans) did. Almost a century later, African voices continue to call out to those who will listen, to draw attention to the continuing exploitation of their natural resources and people, but too few bother to listen and educate themselves and others about the truth behind the sorry stories that come out of that continent. For that reason, Western intervention in places like Algeria and Northern Mali can be disguised simply as a fight against dangerous, mindless Islamic terrorists. The gas extracted from Algeria and Malian uranium (from which the French generate most of their electricity) are hardly mentioned. The Democratic Republic of Congo is another source of valuable resources including the coltan that's used in most electronic gadgets, and newly discovered oil deposits. That country has been a theatre of war for centuries, causing untold misery for their people to this day, but their voices are drowned out by news of celebrities' antics and get-rich-quick talent contests. Robeson's story should continue to inspire us to tune in to voices of those who still cry out for fair trade, equality, justice and peace, wherever they may be, and do something. 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 as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. As a baritone, he has sung as soloist in British concert halls accompanied by orchestra, 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. A song from his CD, RECALLING ROBESON is featured as the July 2008 song of the month on the Labor Notes website.

### **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, in which he also acts. 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 artistic director of Ariya, associate producer for Collective Artistes and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

**Phil Newman, Designer, Assistant Director and Assistant Dramaturge.** Phil trained at Croydon College, where he also spent 3 years as Practitioner-in-Residence in their Theatre Design department. He collaborated with *Call Mr. Robeson* director Olusola Oyeleye on *The Security Guard Ella* (RichMix), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *Coming Up For Air* (UK tour), *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Edinburgh Fringe 2010/Oval House) and *The Playground* (Time Out Critics' Choice/Polka Theatre, London). Other design credits include: *A Christmas Carol & Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink), an open-air *Romeo & Juliet* (Cornucopia Theatre), *Payne Killer* (Merton AbbeyFest 2012), *The Passion* (This Way Up Theatre), *The Liar* (South Hill Park, Bracknell), *Dance or Die* (contemporary dance performance choreographed by Avant Garde Dance's Tony Adigun), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton), *Voices in the Alleyway & Yes, I Still Exist* (Spread Expression Dance), *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre), *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre) and film short *The Judge* for Faith Drama, *The Riddle of the Sands & Laurel & Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), *Hansel & Gretel* (UK tour incl. Greenwich Theatre), *Stockholm* (BAC), open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice & The Railway Children* (Heartbreak Productions) and the award-winning UK/International touring production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna* (Time Out Critics' Choice). He has just designed Shakespeare 4 Kidz' new UK/international touring production of *The Tempest*.

**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:**

**February:** USA/Canada Tour; **March 7:** Old Fire Station, Oxford; **March 22:** Belgrade Theatre, Coventry; **March 27:** Queen's Hall, Hexham; **March 28:** Customs House, South Shields; **March 29:** Alnwick Playhouse **March 30:** The Maltings, Berwick-upon-Tweed; **April 4:** The Ark, Borehamwood; **April 6:** Bolton Octagon; **April 24:** Guildhall Arts Centre, Grantham; **April 25:** Stafford Gatehouse; **April 26:** Ilkley Playhouse

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