

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,

With Michael Conliffe, Piano

Unicorn Theatre*, London. Tues 18 – Sun 23 October 2011

Greetings and Welcome. Way back in October 1958, a man made history not far away from here. Paul Robeson was the first “ordinary” person ever to speak and sing to the congregation in what is probably the biggest and most famous church in the country, St. Paul’s Cathedral. By “ordinary” I mean he wasn’t a preacher or a member of the choir or anything like that, but a member of the public. But as this play shows, there was nothing ordinary about the American Paul Robeson, and the reason he got to sing at St. Paul’s is that he was one of the most famous people on the planet in his day: as a sportsman, singer and actor. However, even though he was extremely talented, famous and rich, he often said things on TV, on radio and at his concerts that his government didn’t like. They caused him a lot of trouble, and even cancelled his passport so that he couldn’t leave America and travel to earn his living. That was between 1950 and 1958, but he refused to back down, and finally he got his passport back and travelled around the world, including London, including St. Paul’s Cathedral. There were 4000 people inside, and 5000 outside to hear him sing that day. What is amazing is that almost exactly 53 years later there are people outside St. Paul’s today. Not for a concert, but for a big protest, for exactly the same things that Robeson was calling for way back then – peace, equality, freedom and fairness. They don’t like the fact that some people make millions without having to work very hard, while ordinary people here are having all sorts of things like play and after-school facilities and libraries cut. And that’s saying nothing about the poverty in other parts of the world, which really can be stopped, if our governments stop spending so much on wars. Protests are also going on in cities in countries all over the world too, and I hope to join in the St. Paul’s demonstration while I’m in London, because I think people there and around the world are making history. I’m sure there’ll be quite a few young people there too! I hope you enjoy the show.

(* Unicorn Theatre is a children and young people’s theatre)