

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,**

**With Michael Conliffe, Piano**

**unity Theatre, Liverpool**

**Thursday 10 and Friday 11 June 2010**

**Greetings and Welcome.** Abbey Road Studios, London. This conjures up the Beatles, of course, but I found out recently that the first ever published recording made in that studio was “Rockin’ Chair” by none other than Paul Robeson – in September 1931! I also understand that EMI, Abbey Road’s famous owners are in financial trouble, having been bought in 2007 by a private equity company, Terra Firma with huge borrowings amounting to some £2.6 billion – now requiring monthly repayments of several million. I don’t propose to pour scorn on big business, having myself fallen into the trap of borrowing to fund questionable goals, such as providing affordable green housing, and then writing, performing and self-producing a play about a long-dead socialist, and expecting people to be interested, in this day and age! Well, as tonight’s performance will hopefully show, it is one hell of a story which people all over the world could do with hearing, and the Edinburgh Fringe is the next, significant step on the road to big things – such as the West End, Broadway, and even the White House! (I Have A Dream Today!). Another interesting fact is that Robeson, at the height of his fame in 1938 performed for the Unity Theatre in London, for free – raising much money for them in the process. Although unity Liverpool is the sole survivor of the Unity theatre movement, it is a fitting place to perform this play, and to appeal, in all humility, for financial assistance from ordinary folk like you, to help get Paul Robeson’s story to Edinburgh and beyond. Enjoy.

**Tayo Aluko. Writer and Performer.** Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now resides 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 also 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, Best Male Performer Award, and a nomination for the Best Show at the 2008 Brighton Festival Fringe. He has performed the play around the UK and to audiences on both coasts of the United States of America and Canada, and in Lagos, Nigeria. Tayo’s other piece titled I GOT A HOME IN BARACK: 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 is now part of the permanent exhibit at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. His CD, RECALLING ROBESON is featured as the song of the month on the Labor Notes website in July 2008.

### **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. 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 Dramaturg** Olusola is also Nigerian, resident in London. She has directed opera, music theatre, and dance in America, Ghana, Zimbabwe and all over the UK, at venues such as the *Royal Festival Hall*, English National Opera (where she was the first black staff director), RSC, Barbican Theatre and the Royal National Theatre. She was resident director on Trevor Nunn's West End production of George Gershwin's musical *Porgy and Bess*. Her production of *The Playground* at Polka Theatre was Time Out 'Pick of the Year' 2004. As a writer, her poetry has been set to music by Akin Euba and performed in the US and UK. She was the judge for the BBC World Service African Theatre competition 2007. Olusola is the executive director of Bush Boy Productions, an associate producer with Collective Artistes and artistic director of Ariya Opera. Her latest piece as producer/director was *High Life*, at the Hampstead Theatre, London.

**Phil Newman, Designer & Assistant Director** Phil's set and costume designs have featured in productions by companies such as Ladder to the Moon, Trestle Theatre, Chalkfoot Theatre Arts, London Shakespeare Workout, Rouge28 Theatre, Heartbreak Productions and Impetuous Kinship. He designed the internationally-acclaimed production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna* (Time Out Critics Choice) which toured extensively in the UK and abroad between 2001 and 2005, *The Playground* (Time Out Critics Choice/Polka Theatre, London) and Victoria Evaristo's *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House, London). Recent design credits include *Stockholm* (BAC, London), the acclaimed *Laurel & Hardy* (Jermyn Street Theatre, London), *Yes, I Still Exist* (Spread Expression Dance), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre, London), Full House Theatre's national tour of *Hansel and Gretel* (incl. Greenwich Theatre), a new musical version of *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre, London), *Xmas Reloaded* (Old Red Lion Theatre, London) and Chalkfoot's *The Riddle of the Sands* at Jermyn Street. Future projects include the set design for Faith Drama's forthcoming production, *Next Door*.

**Sound Design:** David Darlington & Liam McDermott. **Lighting Design:** Gareth Starkey. **Sound Engineering:** Derek Murray. **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

**Thanks to:** Femi Sowande, Sue Williams, Ray Ross Print Factory, Jane Weeks, Colin Iveson, Paul Dustville, Roger O'Hara, Edward Murphy, Brendon Burns, Dorothy Taylor

**Future Performances include:**

June 12: The Playhouse, Derry, Northern Ireland  
June 14,15: The Baby Grand, Grand Opera House, Belfast, Nthn Ireland (date change)  
July 29 – 31: Rich Mix, Bethnal Green, London  
August 6 – 26: Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Zoo Southside)  
October 13 – 15 Clwyd Theatr Cymru, Mold, North Wales  
October 16: Wyeside Arts Centre, Builth Wells, Mid Wales  
October 23: Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, South Wales

**Tayo Aluko and Friends**

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