

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Karel Roessingh , Piano

Victoria Events Centre, Victoria, BC Wednesday 16 April, 2015

Greetings. *“Paul Robeson’s travel abroad at this time would be contrary to the best interests of the United States Government”.* With that, one of the most talented, peace-loving and justice-seeking people of the 20th Century was denied his right to ply his trade internationally for most of the 1950s. He was one of the most high profile victims of a hysteria that bracketed critics of the government as communists, and accused them of seeking the violent overthrow of their government. The kind of people I have found myself associating with here in Victoria in the last few days argue that ever since 9/11, the US authorities have been sliding down slippery slope to hysteria, and curtailing the rights of many citizens under the pretext of upholding national security interests. Bill C-51 (about which I have heard nothing in the news in the last few days) is cited as particularly dangerous for Canadians – including those seeking to protect the environment and First Nations’ land against the destructive forces of rampant capitalism. They remind me that governments have a long history of fomenting fear and distrust among their people in order to repress dissent, and that this is what appears to be happening in this country, once seen as providing a beautiful contrast to the excesses of US imperialism and militarism; why so many Vietnam draft-dodgers fled and remain here, and why many Americans still seek refuge here, even today. Robeson would be as distressed as the rest of us by the news coming out of South Africa today, with immigrant Africans being the target of violence against disgruntled indigenes. The fact remains that there as here, and in most parts of the world, one of the root causes of dissatisfaction and distrust is the fact that greed, inequality and injustice are allowed to persist by the way society is structured, and when people perceive that their efforts to gain access to the basics in life are unjustly thwarted by those who seemingly have an insatiable appetite for wealth, they sometimes resort to desperate measures, and many otherwise innocent ones are easily manipulated by vested interests. We need to remind ourselves of facts like these, rather than distrust fellow human beings, who often need to be watched less scrupulously than those who profess to act in the best interests of national security. 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.

Karel Roessingh, Piano. Dutch-born Karel was raised in Calgary, and began his professional musical career in 1970. He studied jazz arranging and composition at Berklee College of Music in Boston, and completed a degree in secondary music and mathematics education at University of Victoria. He is frequently a featured specialist at jazz workshops, and writes jazz tunes for his own and other groups, and has composed extensively for film, television and video productions, many of which been broadcast world-wide. He has several recordings to his credit, from solo piano to orchestral compositions, and wrote a series of music for interactive toys made by Fisher Price. Karel is a councillor and former Mayor of the District of the Highlands.

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. Phil's Set & Costume Design credits include: *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK & UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *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*. Set Design credits include *Houdini* (UK tour), *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Others with 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 puppet show *Kwaidan*.

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:

April 22: Aberystwyth Arts Centre **April 23, Abertillery:** The Metropole; **April 24, 25, Newport:** The Riverfront; **May 2, Manchester:** The Mechanics Institute;
May 16, Walton-upon-Thames: Riverhouse Barn; **May 23: Barnsley Civic Hall**
August 7: Threlkeld Village Hall, Cumbria; October 24: Swindon Arts Centre
Nov 7: Paramount Hudson Valley, Peekskill, New York
Nov 12 - 15: Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey

This performance is co-sponsored by: Victoria Multi-Cultural Society; Social Environmental Alliance; BC Black History Awareness Society; the UVic Department of History; UVic Cultural, Social and Political Thought Program; UVic Social Justice Studies. Thanks to them, and to Ms. Debby Yaffe

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