

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Glen Giffney, Piano

The Witham, Barnard Castle. Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Greetings, Welcome. Women featured heavily in Paul Robeson's life, in many ways. Whilst many of the relationships would not have met with universal approval, there is no question about the respect he had for women - not just as carers, but as agents of change. He acknowledged this many times, including in his book, *Here I Stand*. He paid tribute to those ancestors who had led many of his people out of slavery, and those that fought for the continued emancipation of his people, through to his day. As with many other issues, he was ahead of his time in calling for women to be given equal say and responsibility in the struggles of the day – something that many feel his successors in the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panthers should have taken much more seriously than they did. Here in the UK, Robeson is said to have met and been inspired by the Labour Women's Movement in London sometime in the 1930s, and they would certainly have reminded him, with pride, of the Suffragettes, who had finally won votes for women only a handful of decades earlier – after many years of determined struggle against the men in parliament. The Women's Equality Party was launched last week without much national press attention (echoing the 19th century?) It was formed by women who remain dissatisfied that after all this time, despite the fact that there has been one female Prime Minister (who they say didn't do much particularly for her gender) and much progress otherwise, a lot still needs to be done – for instance, on equal pay and equal opportunities for women at all levels of society. Then there is the tantalising thought of how, if the WEP develops into a strong movement here in the UK, it might inspire change and progress around the world, particularly in those many places where the suppression and oppression of women is particularly brutal, by any standards. It would be a silly man who says that the WEP is not a good, necessary or timely thing - an illustration that despite the progress made in Parliament over the years, a lot remains to be done. So it is with the struggles that Paul Robeson was an active part of. In the same way as he paid tribute to the men (and especially women) who paved the way for those in his time, and continued their struggles, we acknowledge that the struggle for women's equality, even in this green and pleasant land, is not yet won. 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.

Glen Giffney, Piano. Glen trained at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, and then at the Royal Northern College of Music. He has been involved in numerous prestigious competitions throughout the UK and performed at the European Piano Teachers association in Belgium. He was a finalist in the Keldwyth Award held here in the Lake District. Although classically trained, Jazz has always been a passion in Glen's life and he is currently furthering his career as a Jazz musician.

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:

October 31: Teatro Technis, Camden, London;

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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