

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Bogdan Dulu, Elaine Joe, Piano

Anvil Centre Theatre, New Westminster, BC, Canada

Thursday – Sunday 25 – 28 February, 2016

I wonder how many of you Canadians follow American Football and may have watched the Super Bowl the other week. More memorable than the result of the game was the performance at half time by an artist known as Beyoncé. She surprised millions by bringing politics into her act (probably for the first time ever) with a salute to the Black Panthers and Malcolm X. The Black Lives Matter movement got in on the act by smuggling in posters in support of one of the most recent Black victims of police homicide, Mario Woods. Photographs of the dancers, dressed like Black Panthers, holding this poster have gone viral, though the mainstream media have apparently not deemed it newsworthy. Beyoncé herself has received criticism from many different perspectives - from those objecting to her politicising one of the highlights of the entertainment calendar to those accusing her of trivialising or even disrespecting the memory of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers – real revolutionaries - by the overt sexualisation of her act, which indeed has always been her style, and one of the reasons for her immense success in the entertainment industry. It may be a coincidence that about four years previously, the singer and her equally famous husband, Jay-Z were criticised by the veteran singer and activist Harry Belafonte for neglecting to use their immense appeal and talent to highlight the plight of their people. The old man was not just ignored but rudely dismissed for expressing that opinion, demonstrating the fact that they clearly did not know how important a figure Belafonte was. What chance therefore that they might know who Paul Robeson was, let alone the fact that before Belafonte, before The Black Panthers, and before Malcolm X, there was Paul Robeson. Furthermore, before all the football players on show that day, there was also Robeson, because a century before them, he was achieving national stardom on the football field. Whilst Robeson's career went hand-in-hand with his political activism almost from its beginning, one should welcome Beyoncé's late entry to the small fold of artist/activist, and hope that her activism will develop and grow. One hopes that she will also discover Robeson and transmit his name to the wider world with the full respect that he deserves. May she have the humility to learn from her elders as she proceeds along that path, and live out the truth that Robeson spoke and embodied – that Art can be a formidable weapon in defence of all oppressed people.

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.



Pianist Bogdan Dulu (BMus, MMus, DMA) is an active performer, with appearances in concerts, lectures, festivals, radio and TV broadcasts as well as outreach activities on four continents. His recent engagements include a tour of Atlantic Canada (Oct./Nov. 2015), as well as master-classes and lectures at Dalhousie University (Halifax), University of New Brunswick (Fredericton), and Douglas College (New Westminster). He is proud to make his home in Vancouver, BC.

Elaine Joe started playing piano at the tender age of 4. She studied with the Royal Conservatory and played competitively. Since then, she's studied Popular and Blues piano. Throughout her career, she's played with singers, accordion ensembles, choirs and in a band.

Elaine works as a performer, teacher, composer and an accompanist. She plays for four choirs ranging from a mental health choir to a Ukrainian one. As the choirs are rather eclectic, she has an interesting repertoire of Folk, World, Broadway, Jazz and Popular tunes.



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), *Beauty & the Beast*, *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), *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre) and, most recently, Rouge28 Theatre's new tour of *Kwaidan*, a Japanese ghost story with puppets. Other collaborations with director Olusola Oyeleye include *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *A Wing, A Prey, A Song* (Guest Projects Africa), *The Security Guard* (Merton Abbey Fest 2012), *Ella* (Rich Mix), *Coming Up for Air* (UK tour), *The Playground* (Polka Theatre) and *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House/Edinburgh). He has just started design work on musicals *Carousel* and *Fame* for Amersham & Wycombe College.