

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Phil Blandford, Piano

Assembly Rooms, Frome. Sunday, July 3, 2016

Greetings, Welcome. Yesterday in a remote part of North Yorkshire, a very small organisation held this year's edition of an annual event to commemorate the 4th of July - American Independence Day. "Why in North Yorkshire?" you may ask. The reason is that at Menwith Hill, what used to be an RAF base is currently an American base which is used as a listening post by their security agencies. A dedicated group of concerned citizens have campaigned to have this and other American bases shut down, and declared their annual event the Annual Independence *from* America Declaration Day. I was privileged to participate last year, and chose to recite part of a speech made by one of Paul Robeson's heroes going as far back as 1852. Frederick Douglass titled the speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" It is a speech well worth looking up. Douglass was not only a great orator, abolitionist and pioneer civil rights activist, he was not afraid to be a truth-teller of uncompromising severity, one whose words many would argue are sadly still relevant today. When one thinks on the one hand of the continued murder of Black people around that country today, by police and citizens alike, or the vast populations of Blacks imprisoned over there, could one challenge these words convincingly?: "... *for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy America reigns without a rival.*" He however ended his speech on an optimistic note, believing that the increasing openness of the world would bring about peace and justice. A century later, Paul Robeson was following in the great man's footsteps in speaking truth to power and travelling the world spreading messages of peace, justice and hope. Today, we have all kinds of individuals and organisations, including the aforementioned Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases and others like Campaign Against Arms Trade here, and Veterans for Peace in the USA continuing to shout for anyone listening to hear. Their voices are almost completely drowned out by those that flood the media with words of hate, division, confusion and violence, but as long as we listen to the peacemakers, and add our own voices and actions, there will always be hope that one day we will direct our resources to working towards a more peaceful and just world. The weaponry we have at our disposal are words, art, music, love, and hope. 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, including New York's Carnegie Hall in 2012. He delivers a lecture/concert called *PAUL ROBESON – THE GIANT, IN A NUTSHELL*. 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 has 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*. His new play *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* premieres at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2016.

Phil Blandford, Piano. Phil holds a degree in Music from Bristol University and an Advanced Certificate from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. He regularly provides music for a variety of events in the South West, South Wales and further afield. He has developed a repertoire of hundreds of songs from the last hundred years or so. He is a regular accompanist for several local groups, including Bristol Opera, North Avon Youth Theatre Company and the Amadeus Choir. He also accompanies numerous professional singers and instrumentalists. He plays in several jazz bands of all traditions, specialising in the 1920s styles.

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: *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.

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:

July 3, Frome: Westway Cinema; **July 4: Where R Those WMDs? @ Assembly Rooms,** Frome (Frome Festival); **Aug 4 – 28: Call Mr. Robeson & Just an Ordinary Lawyer @ Edinburgh Fringe.** **Sept 1:** Llandinam Village Hall; **Sept 8 – 11:** Ashland Community Centre, Ashland, OR; **Oct 4 – 8:** "Lawyer", Liverpool Playhouse; **Oct 13:** Edge Hill Arts Centre, Ormskirk; **Oct 14:** Wellingborough Afro-Caribbean Centre. **Oct 21:** Nottingham Playhouse
Nov 13 – 22: Tour of North West Territories, Canada. **Nov 25:** Centre Stage, Surrey, BC;
Dec 2: Lyman Center, New Haven, CT.

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