

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

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

Solva Memorial Hall, Saturday, July 2, 2016

Greetings, Welcome. The Western world appears to be in complete tatters. The United States appears to be at the point of electing a new-fascist as its leader (Heaven forbid!), fascists are on the rise throughout Europe, the Brexit vote has divided friends and family in the United Kingdom, and the two main parties are demonstrating political treachery of Shakespearean proportions, each looking as though it might split in the coming months. The so-called cradle of democracy, Greece, is spluttering on the floor of the world stage, having been stabbed in the back by the EU and its own political leaders. Where to look for good news? Wales are in the semi-finals of Euro 2016 (what's Welsh for "Yay!")? Many around Europe will probably be consulting their maps to find Wales on the world map, this country not having featured in the consciousness of most in footballing circles. Not so with the American, Paul Robeson, who first became aware of the Welsh way back in 1928, only a few years after giving up a prior career as an American footballer to become an actor. It was the sound of the miners' singing that attracted his attention, and that music established a love affair that endures to this day. The words were sung in a language Robeson did not understand, but the harmonies and the feeling they portrayed struck a deep chord with him, one that spoke of the exploitation of one people by another, and the cries of hope and defiance which Robeson's own ancestors had expressed in their own Spirituals. As the words of one of those says, "Joshua commanded the chillum to shout / and de walls come a 'tumblin' down," collective action is a necessary weapon against the most formidable-looking of obstacles. This is a thing that Robeson believed passionately in, and why he was so supportive of trade unionism and inter-racial and international working class struggle. That is also why he was seen as so much of a threat to the Establishment, but we can still celebrate him today. As we watch the Establishment worldwide demonise popular socialist leaders, one can take comfort in the power of music to move mountains, and look forward to the next singing of Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau in Paris. 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 3:** Wesley Methodist Church, Frome (Frome Festival); **Aug 4 – 28: Call Mr. Robeson & Just an Ordinary Lawyer @ Edinbugh 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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