

# CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Jonathan Ellis, Piano

Burton-on-Trent African Caribbean Society, Saturday, October 22, 2016

**Greetings.** The nation joined with the people of Aberfan, Wales yesterday, to remember the terrible mining disaster that claimed the lives of 28 adults and 116 children fifty years ago. Mining disasters were sadly not new to Wales then – among the more notable earlier ones had been one in Gresford in September 1934. That one comes to mind because I was once told by an elderly man on a Wrexham street how he remembered seeing Paul Robeson holding an impromptu outdoor concert to raise money for the miners' families, right there on that very street! He also donated the proceeds of that evening's formal concert to the same cause. Sadly, by the time of Aberfan, Robeson was back home in Philadelphia, probably unaware of this later disaster, because he was in enforced retirement due to very poor physical and mental health, partly as a result of the long years of persecution he had endured at the hands of his government. His health problems were already particularly acute in September 1963 when a disaster also befell children across the Atlantic, when a White supremacist terrorist planted a bomb in a church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four little girls and injured others. The outrage that met that act gave a huge boost to the Civil Rights Movement, and another impressive expression of love and solidarity was shown from South Wales when money was raised by the community (including children giving up pocket money) to pay for a replacement for one of the many huge windows destroyed in the blast. That Window of Wales in Birmingham stands, like memorials to Aberfan do, as a testimony to the international solidarity, love and shared humanity that remind us, at a time when the world seems probably no less greedy or hateful than it was fifty years ago, how outrage at injustice and violence can generate enduring expressions of humanity much more powerful than guns and bombs. Heaven knows that there is a lot to be angry about today, but there are ways of channelling our anger for the greater good, not just of people here in Wales, but across distant shores. The other thing to know is that we are not necessarily as helpless as the mainstream media and our leaders would have us believe, and that we all have within us the power to fight the White supremacy, racism and fascism that still exist everywhere, individually and collectively, for the sake of *all* our children. 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* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2016.

**Jonathan Ellis, Piano and original incidental music.** Jonathan studied music at RNCM and Manchester University. He achieved 1st class degrees from both institutions and has since attained postgraduate-level diplomas in accompaniment and chamber music. At college, he won many prizes as accompanist and solo pianist. He currently performs regularly as a soloist, as chamber musician, as vocal and instrumental accompanist, choral/operatic répétiteur. He is a regular accompanist for City of Manchester Opera, Bury Choral Society and the Pennine Spring Music Festival.

**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, Rouge 28 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**

**Nov 13 – 22:** Tour of North West Territories, Canada. **Nov 25:** Centre Stage, Surrey, BC;

**Dec 2:** Lyman Center, New Haven, CT; **Feb 4:** ACT Arts Centre, Maple Ridge, BC, Canada;

**Feb 11:** Union County Performing Arts Centre, Rahway, NJ;

**Feb 16 – 18:** Evergreen Cultural Centre, Coquitlam, BC, Canada;

**Feb 28:** Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY

**Just An Ordinary Lawyer: Oct 25:** Burdall's Yard, Bath Spa University; **Oct 28:** Bolton Socialist Club; **Jan 16, 2017:** Ustionv Studio, Theatre Royal, Bath;

**Feb 2:** Intrepid Theatre, Victoria, BC, Canada.

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