

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

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

Norman Wells Community Centre, Northwest Territories, Canada. November 14, 2016

Greetings. I had the chance yesterday to talk about Paul Robeson with students at a secondary school in Hay River, particularly demonstrating how the objects I use in the play help tell his story in hopefully an interesting way. With some encouragement, some of them also shared information on certain objects that gave information about their family histories. Easily the most interesting to me was the Aboriginal boy who said that what had been passed down to him was knowledge of how to build an igloo. He also showed me a picture of the one he built last winter! As a former architect, born in one of the warmer parts of the world, I feel incredibly privileged to have met this young man, and to shake the hand of one who is connected to such unique and marvellous skills passed down from his ancestors over millennia. The fact that his people been dispossessed of their land (they lived on what is now Coppermine, I understand) and much of their culture, and that he needs a teaching aid to function in today's society seems wrong somehow, and I hope that his colleagues in the school look at him with more respect having learnt that he possesses something precious and special: a direct link to ancestral knowledge and wisdom. His teaching aide was pleased to tell me that she was also African – from Morocco, and in that little moment, the ability of art - story telling and music - to unite people from different parts of the world with mutual respect was demonstrated wonderfully. So was the usefulness of art in teaching: Coppermine allowed me to tell them the story of Joe Hill through song, and to talk of the concept and importance of Trade Unionism. The students also seemed to appreciate the fact that stories like those of Paul Robeson do indeed have relevance to today's world, and without much prompting, they saw the similarities between what was happening in America in Robeson's time and what is happening there now. Hopefully, the fact that music, art, traditions and skills can be passed down and survive centuries of genocide and persecution will encourage us all to remember that the next four years, however damaging to America and the rest of the world, are but a drop in the great oceans of time, and that by empathising with threatened and oppressed people around the world (using art as much as anything else) we can overcome tyranny and ensure that our children's children will one day tell their own children how the Great Storm that threatened the world in 2016 turned out to be just a short gust of an ill wind that soon passed over and was forgotten. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in England, having worked previously as an architect and property developer. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and has also performed lead roles in operas and musicals. *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada. 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. His new play *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2016.

Bogdan Dulu, Piano and original incidental music. Romanian-born, 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). Dulu is on the piano faculty at the Vancouver Academy of Music and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra School of Music. He makes his home in Vancouver, BC.

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 Design credits include: *Jungle Book & High School Musical* (Elgiva Theatre), *Strange Land*, *Saint/Jeanne* and *Spring Awakening* (Chelsea Theatre), *Carousel*, *Fame*, *Hairspray*, *Cabaret & Attempts On Her Life* (Amersham & Wycombe College), *Kwaidan* (Rouge28 Theatre), *Lord of the Flies & Grimm Tales* (Colet Court School), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), an open-air *Romeo & Juliet* (Cornucopia Theatre), *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*. Collaborations with director Olusola Oyeleye include *Heartbeat - The Musical* workshop (in Lagos, Nigeria), *A Wing, A Prey, A Song* (Guest Projects Africa), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *The Security Guard* (Merton AbbeyFest 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). Phil has recently been appointed Resident Creative Designer at the Colour House Children's Theatre, Merton Abbey Mills where he has designed their 100th production, *Peter Pan* and their forthcoming pantomime, *Cinderella*.

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 17: Igloo Church, Inuvik, NWT; **Nov 19:** Northern Arts & Cultural Centre, Yellowknife, NWT;
Nov 21: Bompas Elementary School, Fort Simpson, NWT; **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.

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