

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Dennis Nelson, Piano

Lyman Center for Performing Arts, New Haven, CT Friday December 2, 2016

Greetings. At the 1949 Paris Peace Conference, the 51-year-old Paul Robeson made a speech that would change the course of his life, initially sparking a massive riot when he returned to perform in Peekskill the following September. A guard of brave trade unionists was needed for protection. One among us was there. In the 1950s, hundreds of people were arrested and tried by the McCarthyite administration for calling for peace, justice and equality. One among us was there. Barely a week ago, a meeting was held in Brazil, by “an anti-imperialist, democratic, independent and non-aligned international movement of mass action” for peace. One amongst us was there – at the age of 94. Even at 94, Alfred L. Marder will still be considered a dangerous man by some. Not because he openly carries a potentially lethal walking stick onto airplanes on his way to Peace conferences, but because he continues a lifetime’s work of organizing people, getting them to come together, to work together to fight a system that oppresses us all. A few weeks ago, he wrote, in response to the recent elections, that *“all forces for peace and justice, peace activists, trade unionists, anti-racist and immigrant rights organizations, women, students must come together overcoming sectarian and partisan differences, in a united front for OUR common program for peace, justice and human needs!”* This is dangerous, seditious stuff, and a 94-year-old must not be allowed to get away with it. Actually, the point is that those of us who are half, a third or a fifth of his age shouldn’t be allowing ourselves to be outshone by such a grand old star. As we contemplate the implications of the incoming government on the lives of people in this country and around the world, we need as much inspiration as we can find to prepare us for what could turn out to be decades of struggle. We can find inspiration in history, and in the same way as Mr. Marder and the Amistad Committee have shared inspiring histories of Freedom struggles in Connecticut and elsewhere with us, we can find in inspiration in stories like Robeson’s to prepare us for the fight ahead. It is sometimes difficult for young or middle-aged people to recognize the effect of history on today’s world, but we don’t often get the opportunity to be in the presence of one whose very life is itself an inspiring history of struggle. The best tribute to such a treasured life, surely, is a promise, a determination, a commitment to pry that baton from that surprisingly firm grip, to unite, and organize for mass struggle for peace and justice. I hope you enjoy this show, dedicated to “Uncle Al.”

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.

Dennis A. Nelson (Piano) Dennis studied at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and at Hofstra University. He is organist and choir director for Trinity Baptist Church in Brooklyn, and accompanist for the New York City Labor Chorus. He is a member of The New Hope Ensemble, a gospel/jazz quintet, and Instrumental Sounds Of Praise (ISOP), a gospel big band aggregation. His songs have been recorded by artists including gospel singer Valerie Boyd, R&B/gospel singer Desiree Coleman-Jackson and actress/singer Jeannette Bayardelle. Recent recording credits as keyboardist/writer include: “Never Turning Back” by the New Hope Ensemble, “Autumn Breezes - Songs For The Harvest” by Gwen Davis-Young, and “For Seasons Of Love” by the Hallmarx Music Group.

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 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). 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

Call Mr. Robeson: Feb 4: ACT Arts Centre, Maple Ridge, BC;
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: Jan 11 – 28: Teatro Technis, London, UK;
Jan 16: Theatre Royal, Bath, UK; **Feb 2:** Intrepid Theatre, Victoria, BC, Canada

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