

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Elaine Joe, Piano

Evergreen Cultural Centre, Coquitlam, BC, Canada. February 16 - 18, 2017

Greetings, Welcome. For some strange reason, the phrase “Beauty and the Beast” came to mind as I was following coverage of your prime minister’s visit to the White House a few days ago. If a world-wide election were held to find the best-looking head of state, Canada would probably stand a better chance of winning than the US. As we have seen recently however, elections can be very strange affairs. We also know that looks aren’t everything. While this country has long enjoyed a reputation as a safe haven for refugees from all over the world (the US included) many think there are too many contemporary similarities with your southern neighbours for comfort. This is demonstrated by the fact that one of the topics discussed at the presidential summit was the proposed pipeline taking Tar Sands from Canada right through the US to the Gulf of Mexico, with all the ensuing environmental and social damage that will be caused en route. Many wonder if and when the scenes that played out at Standing Rock, where the state has shown no hesitation in violently suppressing opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, will be repeated on this side of the border. That was always likely in the time of your former prime minister, but handsome as he and his cabinet may be, and notwithstanding his election promises, many worry that your current prime minister is also showing signs of favouring profitable trade with the Canadian and American oil interests over the environment and people, and that the advance of capitalist exploitation is safe under this administration. This increases the possibility of violence as First Nations communities, mainstream environmentalists and all manner of protesters from all over the country continue to gather to stand in opposition to the pipeline. This will show an uglier face of Canada to the world than that we are currently presented with, and one can only have admiration for those who are brave enough to sacrifice the comfort of an easy life to voice their dissent in all weathers. Nobody did this more remarkably than Paul Robeson, known more for his art than for his activism on behalf of his people and all oppressed people of the world. It is almost certain that if he were around today, he would be adding his voice to the protests on both sides of the border, embodying and representing in the process the most beautiful of people in both countries. 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* premièred at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2016 and received its Canadian and international première in Victoria, BC in early February 2017.

Elaine Joe (Piano) Elaine Joe started playing piano at the tender age of 4. She studied with the Royal Conservatory and played competitively. Since then, she's studied Popular and Blues piano. Throughout her career, she's played with singers, accordion ensembles, choirs and in a band. Elaine works as a performer, teacher, composer and an accompanist. She plays for four choirs ranging from a mental health choir to a Ukrainian one. As the choirs are rather eclectic, she has an interesting repertoire of Folk, World, Broadway, Jazz and Popular tunes. In her spare time, she performs with an accordion squeezebox circle, dances and plays djembe on the beach and is learning cello. Away from the music, she can be found on the mountain snowboarding, x-country skiing or rollerblading in the summer. She has a passion for treehouses and sometimes practices in the trees.

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 28: Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY; **March 4:** Tutbury Village Hall;

April 1: Rous Lench Village Hall; **April 2:** Rolleston Club

April 29: Chelmarsh Village Hall; **May 1:** Theatro Technis, London. **May 13:** Crich Glebe Field Centre

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: April 20: Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds;

May 1: Theatro Technis, London; **May 30, 31:** Manchester Central Library;

June 3, 4: Marlborough Theatre, Brighton; **June 8:** CAST in Doncaster

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