

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

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

**ACT Arts Centre, Maple Ridge, BC, Canada. Saturday February 4, 2017**

**Greetings, Welcome.** Alternative fact #1808: Frederick Douglass is doing a great job. For someone who died in 1895, Mr. Douglass has performed nothing short of a miracle, in getting a sitting President of a country built on slavery and genocide to generate such a large conversation about him. This at a time when race issues have been brought back to public consciousness by the long presidential campaign and the nascent presidency. If it was indeed ignorance that led to the presidential gaff, the same cannot be said of his predecessor, whose intellect was never in question, and who didn't wait until Black History Month to mention Douglass and others – from Dr. King to Rosa Parks and Sojourner Truth. That being said, Mr. Obama was hardly innocent of using alternative facts himself, or of suppressing inconvenient truths. To me, the most glaringly obvious omission was a name which I don't recall ever crossing his lips in public: that of Paul Robeson, a man whose contribution to the fight for racial, social and economic justice in America and around the world was arguably as impressive as Mr. Douglass's. One could argue that the fact that the decision (for it must have been a conscious one) to never mention Robeson's name reminds us that politicians, whatever their colour, all engage in window-dressing to varying degrees. The popularity of Bernie Sanders, who despite bravely labelling himself a democratic socialist almost (and should have) won the Democratic Presidential nomination suggests that Mr. Obama's decision to ignore Robeson and the things he stood for was probably a miscalculation, and symptomatic of the reasons why the people of that country decided to vote in such numbers as to deliver the leadership they now have. In the relatively more welcoming land of Canada, the fact that we find ourselves reeling from the recent terrorist atrocity in Quebec shows that ignorance and bigotry are alive and well on this side of the border too, but the response of the people in BC and other parts of the country has been heartening. I hope that you continue to use art as one of the most effective weapons with which to promote peace, love and understanding, and to remind us that Black History is everybody's history – even if it makes us uncomfortable at times. 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.

**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 100<sup>th</sup> 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 11:** Union County Performing Arts Centre, Rahway, NJ;  
**Feb 16 – 18:** Evergreen Cultural Centre, Coquitlam, BC, Canada;  
**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 13:** Crich Glebe Field Centre

#### **Just An Ordinary Lawyer:**

**April 20:** Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds; **May 30, 31:** Manchester Central Library;  
**June 3, 4:** Marlborough Theatre, Brighton; **June 8:** CAST in Doncaster

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