

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

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

**Union County Performing Arts Center, Rahway, New Jersey, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017**

**Greetings.** “And still she persisted” was a phrase used in stopping a Senator from reading a letter by Coretta Scott King a few days ago, in which she opposed the nomination of the man who was recently appointed Attorney General. As her male colleagues were allowed to read the same letter, many argue that she was silenced for being a woman. That she was reading the words of a Black woman from two decades earlier was probably another reason for their objection, for it seems that we are back in a time in which men in authority expect women – particularly Black women - to be silent, notwithstanding the injustices they suffer or witness going on around them. One can almost feel the discomfort generated by such a telling line as, “*The irony of [his] nomination is that if confirmed, he will be given life tenure for doing with a federal prosecution what the local sheriffs accomplished twenty years ago with clubs and cattle prods.*” That sentence illuminates for a contemporary audience some of the unbelievable recent history of this nation, and follows in the tradition of other great Black women, including Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, and Ida B Wells. There are many more, of course, including some who have shown similar bravery in our own time. Angela Davis comes to mind, as does Bree Newsome (who took down the confederate flag recently) and many of the leaders of today’s Black Lives Matter movement. There will be some in the audience today, and hopefully here in Rahway, who will ensure that the mistakes of some of our predecessors – of trying to relegate women to the sidelines of civil rights struggles - are not being repeated. Paul Robeson, also at the forefront of struggles for social and economic justice, didn’t fall into this trap. Firstly, his formidable wife wouldn’t have let him get away with it even if he had been inclined to try. Secondly, he was always at pains to pay tribute to her and others, and to the women of history who led their people’s struggles, and to urge his contemporaries to value the great contributions made by women in all areas of the community. He also supported the burgeoning careers of the likes of Lorraine Hansberry and Nina Simone. In these and in many other respects, he was ahead of his time. As Mrs. King’s recently rediscovered letter has shown us however, it may take decades for the world to appreciate deeds that need to be done, or things that need to be said. Paul Robeson suffered greatly in the process of taking the stands that he took, but like many before and since, still he persisted. As these times demand, so must we all. 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 wannabe property developer. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and 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 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 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 1:** Teatro Technis, London. **May 13:** Crich Glebe Field Centre

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

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

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

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