

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

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with David Carlston Williams, Piano  
Tutbury Village Hall, Saturday, March 4, 2017

**Greetings.** I finished reading a novel last night, with the simple title of *Scottsboro*. It was a brilliant fictionalised retelling of the infamous, terrible story of nine young Black men falsely accused of raping two white women on a train passing through the tiny Alabama town in 1931. Those men were to spend the following years in disgusting jails, as lawyers engaged by the Communist Party fought to save them from the electric chair. By sad coincidence, it was also yesterday that I learned from an African friend here in the UK that her young son was recently jailed for a year following a charge by a white woman his age, of sexual assault. According to my friend, it was the girl's word against her son's, no firm evidence (the Crown Prosecution Service had apparently decided the previous year that there was no case to answer) and poor representation in court. Whether or not the charge was true and the sentence fair, the question arises as to whether race had anything to do with the case, in the way that it was used by many politicians and pundits in the Brexit campaign, and subsequently. Having said that, two much higher-profile but contrasting sexual assault cases centred around white men are also worthy of note. In one case, the self-confessed perpetrator went on to become the president of the United States, helped along by the votes of millions of mostly white women. In the other, Julian Assange is keen to testify, but worries about falling into the hands of the American state, where he sees the prospect of getting a fair trial as practically non-existent. His crime against them was the sharing of information that the US and other governments (including ours) wished to keep hidden. In the process, the leaked information itself has become less of a story than the demonization of the messengers themselves, and the playing up of the Russian leader as the biggest threat to global peace, contradicting the long-forgotten words of Dr. King from 1966 when he called his own government the greatest purveyor of violence in the world, and setting in motion his coming assassination. Although not physically assassinated himself, Paul Robeson started writing his own long suicide note way back in the 1930s when he drew links between racial, economic, gender, class and anti-colonialist struggles, and shared his world vision with millions, using the medium of art. As International Women's Day approaches, one hopes that appropriate and effective ways can be found to expose, punish and reform those - regardless of race, class or position - who truly perpetrate violence against women, and against society in general.

**Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer.** Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool. He worked previously as an architect and property developer, with a special but as yet frustrated interest in eco-friendly construction. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and has also performed lead roles in such operas and musicals as *Nabucco*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *Anything Goes*. *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, as well as highly favourable reviews in the press - most notably in *the Guardian* and on BBC Radio 4. He has toured the play around the UK, the USA, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, including New York's Carnegie Hall in 2012. 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. He has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana* and *Searchlight Magazine*. His new play *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2016.

**David C Williams, Piano.** David studied at The Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He has been employed as Director of Music of Holy Innocents Church, Fallowfield and as School Organist at Bury Church of England High School. He has also been Director Music at St. Paul's Parish Church, Royton. David has got a teaching degree from Edge Hill University for a P.G.C.E in secondary music teaching.

**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.** Phil's Set & Costume Design credits include: *Saint/Jeanne* and *Spring Awakening - The Musical* (Chelsea Theatre), *Hairspray*, *Cabaret & Attempts on her Life* (Amersham & Wycombe College), *Lord of the Flies & Grimm Tales* (Colet Court School), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours for Shakespeare4Kidz), *Beauty & the Beast*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *A Christmas Carol & Peter Pan* (Tickled Pink), an open-air *Romeo & Juliet* (Cornucopia Theatre), *The Liar* (South Hill Park), *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*. His Set Design credits include *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton), *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre) and, most recently, Rouge 28 Theatre's new tour of *Kwaidan*, a Japanese ghost story with puppets. Other collaborations with director Olusola Oyeleye include *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *A Wing, A Prey, A Song* (Guest Projects Africa), *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). He has just started design work on musicals *Carousel* and *Fame* for Amersham & Wycombe College.

**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: 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; **June 10:** Leominster Festival; **July 6 – 8:** Tara Theatre, London

**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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