

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.
Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Iain Jackson, Piano
Crich Glebe Field Centre, Saturday May 13, 2017

Greetings. I returned from the USA yesterday, having been performing there last week. I also had the great pleasure of spending the day at the new, incredibly impressive National Museum of African American History and Culture. I was pleased to see Paul Robeson featured there in not one but three different sections, and in one place, in a category all to himself: “beyond classification.” This play hopefully reminds us why that is absolutely correct, but it is worth mentioning here because I recall picking up a biography of Martin Luther King Jr. many years ago, and failing to Robeson’s name in the index. This was sadly not surprising because so thorough was the media assassination of this man that not only did some African American historians sometimes contribute to his “forgetting,” but even the last, very intellectual President of the United States to my knowledge never once mentioned his name in public! Well, you can’t keep a good story down, and it is heartening to know that Robeson is finally being properly recognised in his country as a great man, one who tried his best to help his country become a decent, civilised member of the human family. Back in 1946, he reacted to a pronouncement by the then British Foreign Secretary thus: “... *the absence of peace in the world today is due precisely to the efforts of the British, American and other imperialist powers to retain their control over the peoples of Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.*” This is no less true today than it was back then, even to the extent that the current Foreign Secretary shows no signs of being any more enlightened than any of his predecessors. Still, his appointment was the gift of the current Prime Minister, whose mantra of “strong and stable leadership” already has quite a hollow ring to it. By contrast, the man who would relieve her of her position has repeatedly been dismissed by pundits as unelectable, despite managing to win the leadership of his party, *twice*, by a landslide. It is ironic that his long-held beliefs in diplomacy ahead of military intervention, clearly shown to put him firmly and repeatedly on the right side of history, are constantly ridiculed by his opponents, sometimes even from within his own party. Knowing what I know of Robeson and what he suffered at the hands of not just the press but from people who should have supported him, I have no hesitation in stating for the record that my vote in the next general election will be going to the Labour Party, in the hope that we avoid the international disaster that followed the ridiculing and sidelining of Paul Robeson. I hope you enjoy the show.

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, and will feature in the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, USA later this year.

Iain Jackson, Piano and original incidental music. Iain is a graduate of the University of Birmingham and Birmingham Conservatoire, where he studied piano accompaniment. Now in demand as a freelance accompanist based in the Midlands he works at the Birmingham School of Acting and performs regularly with a variety of groups all over the country.

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), and *Twelfth Night* (British Council Tour, Zimbabwe). 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: June 10: Leominster Festival; **July 6 – 8:** Tara Theatre, London;
July 13,15,16: Buxton Fringe Festival; **August 21 – 26:** Edinburgh Fringe

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: May 14: Doncaster United & Free Christian Church;
May 30, 31: Manchester Central Library;
June 3, 4: Marlborough Theatre, Brighton; **June 11:** The Place, Bedford;
July 12, 14, 16: Buxton Fringe Festival; **August 21 – 26:** Edinburgh Fringe

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