

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Holly Arsenault, Piano

Immaculata Auditorium, St. FX Campus, Antigonish, NS. Sunday, February 24, 2018

Greetings, and Welcome. I understand that your Prime Minister recently concluded a rather troubled and controversial state visit to India with a warm embrace with the Indian Prime Minister, after a meeting at which they reportedly discussed trade, defence, climate change, and cooperation over civil nuclear energy. This news item reminded me of the close friendship between the independent India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and Paul Robeson. My research tells me that they first met after a performance at a small workers' theatre cooperative in London in 1938, in which Robeson took the lead role, acting for free despite having received lucrative offers from commercial West End venues, in an effort to boost the company's finances and to promote the play's socialist message. Nehru's own socialist ideals drew him to the play, and then to Paul and Eslanda Robeson, and their friendship would become lifelong. Among other things, they had a shared vision for and cooperated upon the fight for independence of British and other European colonies, and the Robesons supported Nehru and his colleagues in that struggle in India and also in Africa and elsewhere. They once also shared a platform in London at a meeting to discuss internationalism and the need for united action against Fascism. It is quite something that the two men's shared love of art would bring them together to contemplate these big issues, and it is notable that arts and culture were not among the topics reported as having been discussed at the Delhi summit earlier this week. Perhaps they did, or perhaps it wasn't considered as important as matters such as defence. If this is the case, it is surely a missed opportunity in an era when Fascism seems to be on the rise again internationally. The potential for the arts to promote peace, understanding and even business is beyond doubt, so it would be good to think that your Prime Minister (who gives the impression of being quite enlightened) had that as an item for discussion. They did after all discuss defence; it would have been nice if they had been inspired by the examples of Nehru and Robeson, who said he chose to use his art as a weapon in defence of his people and all oppressed people of the world. One dreams of the day when this becomes compulsory at all international summits, held after cultural events of one kind or another. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and now lives in Liverpool, UK, where he worked previously as an architect. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and 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, and has taken him around the UK, the USA, Canada, Jamaica and Nigeria, including New York's Carnegie Hall in 2012. He delivers a lecture/concert titled *FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE*: a talk about Black Political Resistance, illustrated with spirituals. 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 deals with ancient Africa has been performed several times in the UK. His piece titled *WHAT HAPPENS?* features the writings of African American Langston Hughes, and is performed 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* has been performed on three continents, including at the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Holly Arsenault, Piano. In addition to being one of Halifax's most sought-after sidepersons, pianist Holly Arsenault is the producer and host of "*Holly Arsenault Presents*," a series featuring her in duo with her favourite collaborators from Halifax and across Canada. Her original music has been featured in the Global/ABC series *Rookie Blue*, and her extensive work in Canadian theatre has earned her a *Dora and Merritt* nomination. www.hollyarsenaultmusic.com

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), *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*. Other Design credits include *Our House* (Elgiva Theatre), *Cinderella* (Library Theatre, Luton), *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre) and Rouge 28 Theatre's 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 recently designed 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: Feb. 27: RVCC Arts, Branchburg, NJ; **March/April:** UK tour (see website) **May 11,12:** Castillo Theatre, New York, NY

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: March 1: Hofstra University, Long Island, NY.

March - May 2018: UK tour: Walton-on-Thames, Salford, Alnwick, Hexham, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Doncaster, Beetham (see website: www.justanordinarylawyer.com)

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