

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with John French, Piano
Midland Cultural Centre, Midland, Ontario. Sunday February 18, 2018

Greetings, Welcome. Browsing Ontario news on my arrival here yesterday, two things stood out: shenanigans in the Progressive Conservative Party, and a scheme to arrange for young Black Canadians to get to watch the new Marvel Superhero movie for free. A few words about the latter. It is apparently based on a fictional African state that was never colonised, whose people were never enslaved, and who achieved societal and scientific advancement unparalleled elsewhere. Historians of Africa would point to a time centuries ago when this was definitely the case, before Africa's treasures - human and mineral - began to be plundered by Europeans, or credit for her historic achievements claimed by them. Secondly, its hero possessed superhuman powers. How else does one describe a man who excelled in all the sports he turned his hand to, was a renowned scholar, bibliophile, polyglot, world-renowned musician, and a civil rights activist who took everything that the State threw at him and still emerged from the battle standing tall, dignity intact, few scars obvious as his detractors lay littered behind him? I speak of course of Paul Robeson, who when the Black Panther figure appeared in 1960s comic books had lived a life that would have been dismissed as impossible. He was made to suffer because he refused to believe that a better America, a better world was not possible. In that, he preceded the Black Panther Party for Self Defence by several decades, and their ideology is something else that merits rediscovery and re-examination, even here in Canada, where I understand chapters of that organisation existed for several years. Whether or not conditions on this side of the Canadian-American border necessitate such a re-examination as much as they do elsewhere is for others to judge, but one cannot but imagine what good the movie will do for young and older minds, regardless of their heritage. Similarly, one anticipates the coming one day of a major movie about Paul Robeson, or indeed a First-Nations super-hero. Even on the much more modest platform of the theatrical stage, such stories can and must be told. So, as the political circus continues to roll, let us rejoice in the ability of Art to grant us all truly superhuman powers. 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.

John French, Piano. Born and raised in Midland, John French began his music studies at the age of five with piano lessons. His love of music led to a B.Mus. Degree from Wilfrid Laurier University, an ARTC in piano performance, a Master's Degree in Musicology from the University of Toronto and additional post-graduate studies of 19th century vocal music. John subsequently earned an MBA in Arts Administration at York University. A career in business never diminished John's passion for music; witness a lifetime of public performances as an accompanist and recitalist, teacher, choral director, founder of Brookside Music Association, and volunteer in numerous cultural and charity events, which earned him Midland's first Excellence in Culture award in 2015.

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. 20: Hants East Rural High School, Milford Station, NS; **Feb 23:** Imperial Theatre, St. John, NB; **Feb. 25:** Immaculata Auditorium, Antigonish, NS; **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)

Tayo Aluko & Friends
24 – 26 Mount Pleasant
Liverpool L3 5RY

info@tayoalukoandfriends.com www.callmrrobeson.com
facebook: Call Mr. Robeson **Twitter:** @CallMrRobeson

