

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Dennis Nelson, Piano
RVCC Arts, Branchburg, New Jersey. Tuesday, February 27, 2018**

Greetings, Welcome. Less than half an hour's drive from here, in Hunterdon, a Black youth won the region's high schools wrestling championship a few days ago. He had already made a name for himself for "taking a knee" with some of his football teammates. He and his colleagues took a lot of criticism for that, as did the professionals. This young man has continued his protest, on his own, in the wrestling season. Monroe High School's Kaylon Bradley reminds one of Paul Robeson, not just in achieving sporting excellence, but also in standing firm for one's beliefs, regardless of the consequences and the possible loneliness of the struggle. Just over a hundred years ago, the young Robeson had begun showing his sporting and academic promise at Somerville High School down the road from here, before going on to Rutgers College, where he would, as the only Black student, suffer the indignity of having to live separately from his school mates, and sometimes eat separately from them when on tour with the football or debating teams. Racial segregation is no longer the norm here in the US, but extra-judicial killings are, and as the recent Florida high school shooting shows, race is not always a factor. Students of all colors are preparing a march on Washington next month, and perhaps RVCC students will be among them, or are organising local protests. It is heart-warming and inspiring to see young people getting together to hold politicians' feet to the fire, calling them out for accepting financial support from the National Rifle Association, and eloquently predicting that those who continue to do so have their political days numbered. One is reminded of the fact that large numbers of youth of all colors were instrumental in the success of the civil rights movement half a century ago. Their time has come again, it seems, and rather than stand back and applaud, or hide, as too many did in Robeson's time, the rest of us should give them our wholehearted support, for we know that many corrupt, spineless and unprincipled adults in Washington won't budge unless we join the youth and cut short those far-from-innocent political lives before they and their sponsors do any more damage. I hope Robeson's story continues to inspire today's youth as they themselves inspire the rest of us. 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.

Dennis A. Nelson (Piano) Dennis studied at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and also here at Hofstra University (Class of '86). 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 keyboardist/writer recording credits 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), 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: 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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