

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

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Holly Arsenault, Piano  
Imperial Theatre, St. John, New Brunswick. Friday, February 23, 2018

**Greetings, Welcome.** Canada is ahead of the United States on the Winter Olympics medal table, which no doubt pleases many of those Canadians who are always keen to show their superiority over their Southern neighbours. It is certainly tempting to argue that when the president of a nation openly advocates the arming of teachers in order to protect school children from citizens bearing war-grade weaponry, practically any other country in the world can consider itself to have achieved a greater level of civilisation than the nation in question. Many Canadians would argue that this has always been the case when comparing themselves with Americans, since (to use one example) slavery was not practiced here. They would be wrong, of course, but there will be many here who will be unaware of that history, or the more recent history of racial segregation in New Brunswick. An article has come out recently of hotel accommodation having been denied to none other than Paul Robeson in 1945, even at the height of his fame, after selling out a concert here in St. John. If they could do that to a Robeson, imagine what life was like for ordinary Black people then. And then go further back in history to the founding of this country. The mere existence of so many white people and the near-disappearance of aboriginal peoples speaks to a genocide of proportions that would probably equate to a few modern-day US school shootings daily. So, despite whatever temptation exists to do so, one-upmanship is uncalled for, when the true stories behind the achievement of present-day standards of living, the theft of land, of livelihoods, of histories continue to be suppressed, denied or whitewashed. Stories like Paul Robeson's 1945 visit, his triumph over the indignity, are inspiring enough. Even more inspiring (and just) would be the constant telling of stories of Aboriginal Canadians, especially those who fought, like Robeson did, not just for their own people's rights, but for all Canadians' rights. They have contemporary descendants who continue such work, especially with regard to protection of the environment against rapacious capitalism, despite often falling foul of the so-called law in the process. Thankfully, Canada has gone in a different direction from her cousin in terms of gun culture, and one hopes and assumes that a very different, more positive and effective \*weapon" is being supplied *en masse* to teachers and students in your schools: teaching history through Art, as Robeson did, seeing his Art as his weapon in defence of his people, and all oppressed people. 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](http://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. 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](http://www.justanordinarylawyer.com))

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