

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Thomas Kell, Piano

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Greetings, Welcome. Thankfully, No. 45 didn't say yesterday that Dr. King was "doing an amazing job," as he had said of Frederick Douglass last year. The truth however is that MLK is, in reminding us fifty years since his death, of the extent to which powers-that-be would go to prevent a radical message from taking hold among the general public. Countless African and Latin American leaders suffered in the same way, and if they aren't physically killed, their character is besmirched, as we have seen with Winnie Mandela since her passing three days ago. Paul Robeson was similarly a target in his time, and was portrayed as intent, with his fellow travellers, on the violent overthrow of his country. Still, he kept singing his songs of peace, hope and international brotherhood, and his message, like Dr. King's, proves to be as relevant and urgent today as it was sixty, seventy years ago. By constantly swimming against the prevailing tide of militarism and jingoism, he set himself up as a target of political opponents from all sides, and the media. These, to my mind, describe what the Labour Party Leader is going through right now, and it reached a new level of ridiculousness when he was criticised for celebrating Passover with a Jewish group who happen to be critical, like he is, of the Israeli state's actions. The gunning down of innocent Palestinian protestors in the last few days is bad enough, but add to this the treatment of Africans fleeing persecution in their countries, and Israel's refusal to grant them sanctuary (as their Jewish forebears had been granted when fleeing persecution in earlier centuries) largely because of the colour of their skin, one could argue that the finger of racism is pointing in the wrong direction. Figures like King, the Mandelas and the Robesons are all too few and far between, and at times like this when we are offered choices between politicians as different as chalk and cheese, with such extremely different grasps of the histories that shape our world, they serve as a useful reminder for us to defend those with a proven track record of standing up for the oppressed, for the many, not the few. 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 in August 2017.

Thomas Kell, Piano. Thomas is a musician and arts producer, with a particular interest in African theatre. Between 2007 and 2015 he was the Administrative Director of Tiata Fahodzi, working, successively with Artistic Directors Femi Elufowoju, jr, Lucian Msamati and Natalie Ibu. Until recently he was a Senior Programme Manager for the British Council working on the worldwide Shakespeare Lives initiative. Other commitments include directorships at Pursued by a Bear Theatre Company and the Elufowoju Jr Ensemble and consultancy for Tangle Theatre, The Art Machine and Faith Drama. He is Director of Music for the churches of Our Most Holy Redeemer, Exmouth Market and St Mark's Myddelton Square, in Clerkenwell. Thomas studied music in Görlitz, Germany before taking up the Organ Scholarship at Trinity College, Oxford where he was responsible for supervising the musical celebrations for the tercentenary of the Chapel. Thomas has never been to Nigeria but is grateful to the many artists, such as Tayo Aluko, whose skill and talent make him feel as if he has!

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: April 12: Tullynessle & Forbes Hall; April 13: Phoenix Centre, Newton Dee; April 14: New Deer Pulic Hall; April 28: Swanland Village Hall; April 29: Barton Assembly Rooms; May 2: Theatre by the Lake, Keswick; May 11, 12: Castillo Theatre, New York; May 20: North Dalton Village Hall; May 24: Dorchester Arts Centre; May 25: Bridport Arts Centre.

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: April 18: Alnwick Playhouse; April 19: Queen's Hall, Hexham; April 20: The Maltings, Berwick-upon-Tweed; April 26: CAST in Doncaster; April 27: Heron Theatre, Beetham; May 3: Theatre by the Lake, Keswick; May 5, 6: Harare International Festival of the Arts, Zimbabwe; May 19: Belgrade Theatre, Coventry; May 26: Merlin Theatre, Frome.

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