

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Dennis Nelson, Piano
Castillo Theatre, New York. Friday, Saturday, May 11, 12, 2018**

Greetings, Welcome. I was privileged recently to be at the screening, as part of the Workers Unite! Film Festival, of a documentary about Howard Zinn, who in 1945 was in the US Armed Forces, thinking he was contributing to the fight against Fascism, was part of a mission dropping napalm bombs in Europe. He later realised that the massive civilian casualties were unnecessary, and the official accounts and justification of those actions false. This experience led him to develop an interest in accounts of history in the voice of “the voiceless,” producing a seminal work called *A People’s History of the United States, 1492 to the Present*, first published in 1980. In the documentary, it was shown how much of that history was about immigrant people’s constant and fearless struggles against exploitation by “robber barons,” and the extent to which government, the media, the armed forces went to demonise and suppress them. The use of war for the generation of immense profits for banks and military industrialists was also highlighted, as were the propaganda tactics used to prepare populations for war. It names trade union leaders, peace campaigners and freedom fighters as heroes, and constantly refers to instances of collective action winning victories that many take for granted today. The book has apparently been heavily criticised since its first publication, and even banned in some states. It is no surprise that Paul Robeson features in this history, although like many of the individuals mentioned, he is not as well known today as he deserves to be, for the same reasons – he was an embodiment of the thing that the capitalists fear the most – someone who made the masses aware of the power that they have in their possession, if they unite. Robeson’s story is thus one that has tremendous resonance in today’s world, for his method of uniting people was through art, which he described as his weapon on behalf of *all* oppressed people. As we watch history repeat itself in ways that Zinn’s writings easily explain, one hopes that stories of Robeson and all the other heroic women and men portrayed in the Workers Unite! Film Festival inspire us to celebrate true heroes, and find in ourselves the tools with which to unite, and identify and fight the true enemies of the 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 in August 2017.

Dennis A. Nelson (Piano) Dennis studied at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and at Hofstra University. 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: May 20: North Dalton Village Hall;

May 24: Dorchester Arts Centre; May 25: Bridport Arts Centre.

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: May 19: Belgrade Theatre, Coventry;

May 21: The Inner Temple, London; May 26: Merlin Theatre, Frome.

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