

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Nicholas Sykes, Piano**

**New Dalton Village Hall, Sunday May 20, 2018**

**Greetings, Welcome.** The young couple had hoped for, and planned a quiet, private wedding in a nondescript location. When they turned the corner, however, they found “*the street filled with hundreds and hundreds of people, standing there and screaming all kinds of hostile things at us as we got out of the cab.*” This is clearly not an account of yesterday’s wedding, but that of Marilyn Greenberg on the day of her marriage to Paul Robeson, Jr., on June 19, 1949. This was two months after her new father-in-law had made a speech in Paris that the press would use to paint him as a dangerous anti-American. As if that wasn’t bad enough, his son was marrying a white woman, even if, according to one letter to Mr. Robeson, she was “*only a kike,*” in reference to her Jewish heritage. Worse still, her own father also refused to attend the wedding, because, she said, “*he was very resistant to the idea of my marrying a black man.*” Despite all that hostility and resistance, the marriage lasted until Paul, Jr.’s death in 2014 – an affirmation of “the redemptive power of love.” Yesterday’s wedding would have come as a relief to many people in that it distracted them from coverage of other tedious matters. Jeremy Corbyn for one, for he has faced relentless accusations of anti-Semitism within his party. And then the Israeli government, for whom international criticism has reached an unprecedented peak in the last few days as they have slaughtered scores of Palestinians peacefully protesting the occupation of their land and their confinement in unliveable conditions in Gaza. What is new in terms of criticism of Israel is the increasing numbers of Israelis, Jewish people around the world and even supporters of Labour Friends of Israel (no friends of Mr. Corbyn’s) who are finally joining the ranks of the critics. Robeson would later state that he made no apology for his position, and that criticism of his country came from an intense love for her. Martin Luther King, Jr., would say the same twenty years later when decrying America’s triple ills of racism, militarism and economic inequality. It wasn’t long before he paid with his life. Thankfully Paul Robeson didn’t suffer the same fate, but to this day, he is still viewed with suspicion, if not outright derision for his views, despite all evidence to suggest that he was on the right side of history on most things. This may or may not include his support for the formation of the State of Israel, which he understood as part of the process of searching for a safe haven by a persecuted people (much as his own people had done in the northern states and in Canada) but one would venture to suggest that from that very same place of love for the Jewish people he supported, his voice would be among the chorus of disapproval at what is going on in Israel today. 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 and the Harare International Festival in May 2018.

**Nicholas Sykes, Piano.** Nicholas currently lives in Howden. Having retired from teaching six years ago after 33 years as Head of Music in the private sector, his last post being at Clock House School, the prep school for Bradford Grammar School. Nick now spends much of his time accompanying at music festivals and concerts, playing and conducting local choirs and music groups, including Snaith Choral Society.

**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; August 10: Community Music Center, Portland, OR, USA;**  
**August 12 – 15: Ashland Community Center, Ashland, OR;**  
**August 21 – 25: Edmonton Fringe, Alberta, Canada; Oct 4: Tring Theatre, Hertfordshire**

### **Just An Ordinary Lawyer:**

**May 21: The Inner Temple, London; May 26: Merlin Theatre, Frome;**  
**August 19: Gabriola Festival, BC, Canada; August 22 – 26: Edmonton Fringe, Alberta, Canada**

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