

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Alton Merrell, Piano
Alphabet City, Pittsburgh, PA. Monday, November 12, 2018

Greetings, Welcome. To say that I feel almost unworthy of the hospitality I have enjoyed at City of Asylum's Winged House is no attempt at false modesty but a recognition of the fact that the house was set up as a place of sanctuary for writers who are exiled or under threat of persecution, from around the world. The closest I have come to this is being detained at the Canadian border for not having a work visa, and only for one night! Paul Robeson was persecuted though, and his story is that of the son of an escapee from slavery who would have been sheltered by dozens of good, brave people on his journey from North Carolina to New Jersey in the mid-19th Century. Only two days ago in Lancaster, PA, I saw a water cistern, exposed during excavations of an old basement (and now thankfully preserved) which is believed to have served as a hiding place for fugitives, in the home of one Thaddeus Stevens, a radical Republican Congressman of the time. How complete the transformation of that same party to one that now uses manufactured fear of refugees to win elections to all levels of government! And the political game-playing that saw thousands of soldiers needlessly deployed to the southern border (rather than California) seems that much more contemptible as we remember the centenary of the end of WWI – which saw millions of young working class men sent to needless deaths by politicians and industrialists of the time. Speeches made in the last two days ring particularly hollow as politicians continue to work with arms manufacturers to export death and destruction around the world, creating waves of refugees and asylum seekers coming to America. It is also ironic that they come to a place where the majority of people watch helplessly the almost-daily massacres of the innocents in what should be safe spaces, while Republican (and some Democratic) politicians do nothing to address the situation. Like the writers whose hopes and dreams soar beyond prison walls to create places of peace and security, one hopes that the recent elections mark the beginning of an eventual victory against the manufacturers, peddlers and exporters of weapons of hate, and that the trade that flows to and across borders is in those beautiful weapons of love all kinds, collectively known as art. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. Nigerian-born and a former architect, Tayo lives in Liverpool, UK, 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. His audiovisual piece on West African History before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is 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. He originated a piece titled *WHAT HAPPENS?* featuring the writings of African American Langston Hughes, is performed with live jazz accompaniment. He has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana* and *Searchlight Magazine*. His 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 at the Harare International Festival of the Arts in May 2018.

Dr. Alton L. Merrell earned Music degrees from Youngstown State University and the University of Pittsburgh. He leads the instrumental and vocal ensemble "Dr. Alton Merrell & Impact" whose award-winning CD is "You're The Reason." He is a current member of the Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra and has performed with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, Cleveland State Jazz Heritage Orchestra, Pittsburgh Concert Chorale, YSU All-Star Alumni Jazz Ensemble, Warren Philharmonic Orchestra, and the OMEA Intercollegiate All-Star Jazz Ensemble. Dr. Merrell has received numerous honors, has toured China and is the recipient of Founces M. Luley Music Scholarship.

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: Arawa (Mboka Festival); Sidney's Last Shift (York Theatre, Royal); A Raisin in the Sun (Farnham Maltings); Tin (The Lowry), Ti-Jean and his Brothers (National Theatre, Cottesloe), Resident director to Trevor Nunn, Porgy and Bess (Savoy Theatre), Staff Producer, English National Opera; Spirit of Okin and Sankofa, Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble (UK & International tours), Zhe (Collective Artistes, Soho Theatre), The Shelter (RSC Barbican Theatre), Medea (Ariya, National Theatre Studio), The Playground (Polka Theatre, Time Out Critics' Choice Pick of the Year), High Life, (Hampstead Theatre), Maybe Father, (Talawa, Young Vic), Twelfth Night (British Council, Zimbabwe). Opera includes: The Pied Piper of Chibok (Grimeborn Festival); 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 (St. Louis African Chorus), Dido and Aeneas (Tricycle/BAC). Olusola has worked in The Gambia, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. She is a lecturer at UCA and St Mary's Universities, and was Head of Acting at Morley College. Her poetry has been set to music by Akin Euba and performed at Harvard and Cambridge Universities. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

Phil Newman, Designer, Assistant Director. Phil's recent Design credits include: *The Little Mermaid & The Wonderful World of Oz* (UAE tours, S4K International), *Pinocchio & A Christmas Carol* (Voice of the Show, Chesham), *The Mikado* (Network Theatre), *Jungle Book* (Elgiva Theatre), *Bernarda Alba, Strange Land, Saint/Jeanne & Spring Awakening* (Chelsea Theatre), *The Tempest & Pinocchio* (UK/UAE tours, Shakespeare4Kidz), Japanese ghost story *Kwaidan* (UK/International tour), *Carousel, Hairspray & Cabaret* (Amersham College) and a huge walk-through Xmas Grotto at Wyevale Garden Centre, Aylesbury in 2017. For *Call Mr Robeson* director Olusola Oyeleye he has also designed *The Security Guard* (Colour House), *High Life* (Hampstead Theatre), *Coming Up for Air* (UK tour), *The Playground* (Polka Theatre) and *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House/Edinburgh). Further credits include: *Lord of the Flies* (Colet Court), *Dance or Die* for Avant Garde Dance's Tony Adigun, *Voices in the Alleyway & Yes, I Still Exist* (Spread Expression Dance), *The Riddle of the Sands & Laurel and Hardy* (Jermyn St Theatre), *The Famous Five* (Tabard Theatre), open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice & The Railway Children* (Heartbreak) and the original multi-award-winning touring production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna*. Phil is proud to be an Associate Artist with director Gbemisola Ikumelo's Faith Drama Productions, for whom he has designed *Custody* (Oval House), *The Fiddler* (Unicorn Theatre) and *Next Door* (Cockpit Theatre). Since 2016, he has been the Resident Creative Designer at Colour House Children's Theatre near Wimbledon.

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: Dec 7: Bolton Socialist Club, UK. Feb 16: Metro Studio Theatre, Victoria, BC, Canada; March 4 – 9: Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, Ireland

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: Feb 16: Metro Studio Theatre, Victoria, BC, Canada; March 11 – 16: Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, Ireland

Tayo Aluko & Friends

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