

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Anja Kuncic, Piano
Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin. 4 – 9 March, 2019**

Greetings, and Welcome. It was quite a thrill to discover the other day that *Othello*, the role of which Paul Robeson remains the most famous modern performer, was the very first Shakespearean play to be staged in Ireland, in 1662, and right here at Smock Alley! Whoever performed it then would likely have blacked up, of course; but by 1831 a famous African American, Ira Aldridge, would perform it for the first time in Dublin, and become extremely well received in this country and around Europe. A refugee from his country, he made London his home, and actually died while on tour in Poland. It is remarkable how the *Othello* story - that of a supremely accomplished immigrant is mirrored in the lives of people like Aldridge and Robeson; but so too is the fact that the forces that led them to feel more comfortable outside their country remain at play today, despite decades and centuries of knowledge at our fingertips. One of the more persuasive reasons behind the success of the Leave campaign in the UK was the perceived threat of mass immigration from Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. Ironically, I understand that the Irish immigration authorities are extremely busy with a flood of applications for passports from British citizens as Brexit looms. I wonder how many Irish consider this an invasion? Irish Citizenship is presumably also popular among Americans, given the state of politics in their country right now, as it is with people fleeing war, persecution and poverty around the planet. While we seem to have an incredible tendency to repeat mistakes of the past, it is also gratifying to be able to unearth histories that can provide inspiration to us as we confront the challenges of today. There are few more remarkable and inspirational figures than Robeson, who chose to use his art to demonstrate and celebrate our shared humanity. It is interesting that his love for socialism, which contributed to his undoing, is now showing tentative signs of revival among a new breed of popular politicians and citizens on both sides of the Atlantic, who feel, like Robeson did, that a fairer, more peaceful and more just world is worth fighting for. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. Nigerian-born and a former architect, Tayo lives in Liverpool. 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.

Anja Kuncic, Piano. Ms. Kuncic, a native of Slovenia, is part of a generation of "multilingual" musicians, who have studied both classical and jazz at the music conservatories in Ljubljana. As an experienced accompanist to singers, instrumentalists and choirs, Anja has performed at diverse venues such as The Slovenian National Philharmonic Hall, Slovenian Parliament, Paraninfo Theatre in Madrid, RTE Radio Dublin, The Sugar Club. She regularly appears in musical theatre in and around Dublin and has also worked with the Downtown Big Band and the Irish Film & Pops Orchestra. Anja founded and runs her own mobile piano school, Piano Lessons Dublin (pianolessons.dublin.com).

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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: Till March 9, Dublin, Ireland: Smock Alley Theatre;
March 27, Cambridgeshire: Histon Library; **April 5, OH, USA:** Kent State University;
May 3,4, Glasgow: Queen's Park Arena; **May 7- 10, Vancouver, Canada:** Havana Theatre

Just An Ordinary Lawyer:

March 11 – 16, Dublin: Smock Alley Theatre; **May 10, 11, Vancouver, Canada:** Havana Theatre

What Happens?: April 9: Theatr Clwyd, Mold, Wales; **April 10:** Liverpool Philharmonic Music Room

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