

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Bill Meyer, Piano
Cartwright Hall, Kent State University, Ohio, USA. Friday, April 5, 2019

Greetings, and Welcome. The May 4 Visitors Center brought to life for me yesterday the horror of the event that happened on this very campus forty nine years ago next month. Also included in the exhibit are the slightly lesser known (in these parts) shootings at Jackson State University, Mississippi, eleven days later (which resulted in the death of two Black students) and at South Carolina State University, Orangeburg two years previously, which claimed three lives. In the two former cases, the students had been protesting the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia, and at Orangeburg, racial segregation. It is beyond comprehension that young citizens calling for peace and racial equality can lose their lives at the hands of the State, in a country which many repeatedly describe as the greatest on earth, and whose current president rode to power on a promise to “make great again” – presumably because it had lost its way by daring to elevate a Black man to that highest of offices. Whatever the faults of Mr. Obama, one of his last acts in office was to grant the site of the Kent State shootings National Historic Landmark status, but the behaviour of the incumbent indicates that there is no guarantee that this designation is safe. That notwithstanding, the necessity for such shameful moments in modern American history to be marked and told again and again is crucial, as we look at current killings of innocent citizens at the hands of armed forces, be it here or in faraway places like Palestine. More recent events in Charlottesville remind us that we have in our midst hundreds and thousands of people who still hold onto the notion of White Supremacy, and for whom violence is almost second nature. It reminds one of another event seventy years ago, also generally unrecognised in most of this country, when a Paul Robeson concert resulted in violent riots and could only proceed at the second attempt after the rallying of thousands of trade unionists as volunteer guards. The racism and anti-Semitism displayed then, coupled with the connivance of the local authorities showed this country as close as it has come to fascism, perhaps until now. Then, as now, Robeson and his supporters triumphed with the sheer power and beauty of art and love, two commodities we need a lot more of today. 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.

Bill Meyer, Piano. Detroit resident Bill Meyer has led the Bill Meyer Group, a popular dance band for over 30 years, and is also part of the acclaimed SBH Jazz Trio. He composes and arranges music for TV, film and advertising and was formerly music director, conductor and pianist for Motown’s Martha Reeves. Other stars he has also worked with include Smokey Robinson, Cab Calloway and Natalie Cole. In 1987, he wrote and produced The Detroit Tribute to Paul Robeson. Despite being neither Jewish, Black nor Palestinian, he has been involved in the setting up of Detroit chapters of Jewish Voice for Peace and The Palestine Office, and in the reestablishment of the Hamtramck NAACP. He was also formerly the chair of the Hamtramck Human Relations Commission.

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" Representatives Walter, Arens and Scherer. **Male Voice Choir:** Liverpool Male Voice Choir

Forthcoming Performances Include

Call Mr. Robeson: April 15, NJ, USA: Paul Robeson Community School for the Arts, New Brunswick
May 3,4, Glasgow: Queen's Park Arena; **May 7- 10, Vancouver, Canada:** Havana Theatre
July 11, 18: Buxton Fringe Festival

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

Just An Ordinary Lawyer:

May 10, 11, Vancouver, Canada: Havana Theatre; **July 12, 19: Buxton Fringe Festival**

Tayo Aluko & Friends

First Floor, Liver House, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY

info@tayoalukoandfriends.com www.tayoalukoandfriends.com

facebook: Call Mr. Robeson **Twitter:** @CallMrRobeson **Tel:** +44 151 707 8187