

PAUL ROBESON: THE GIANT, IN A NUTSHELL

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Timothy Steele, Piano
Milton Parish, Milton, MA. Sunday, May 26, 2019

Greetings, and Welcome. “I come from a great country to a great country.” I was in the audience when President Jimmy Carter opened his address at the National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria in 1978. It got a huge round of applause. At the time, Nigeria was in its heyday, spending its oil wealth (and international loans) on massive infrastructure projects, and optimism for the future of the country was high. I have lived in England since then, having planned to return to make my contribution to the country’s development after training as an architect. I come to you now as a musical storyteller, and even with my different creative skills, am unable to repeat Mr. Carter’s words with any hope of them truthfully applying to any of those three countries. Here, we see a Democratic lawmaker (who happens to be a Black woman) suggest at a House Homeland Security hearing that the deaths of migrant children in detention centres in the Southern borders might be part of a deliberate policy. Immediately afterwards, Republicans led a vote to admonish Congressmember Underwood, had her statement stricken from the record and barred her from participating in the rest of the session. We have also just heard of additional charges laid on Julian Assange, and Chelsea Manning facing further jail time – all of this for bringing to light serious crimes against humanity committed by your government. Two other American political prisoners whose names may be known to some of you are Leonard Peltier, the native American activist, and Mumia Abu Jamal, the journalist and former Black Panther. These people all follow in the footsteps of Paul Robeson, who in 1951 presented a petition to the United Nations titled “We Charge Genocide” in reference to his country’s treatment of his people; and he did this not long after his passport was cancelled for his continued criticism of his government. Almost 70 years later, we see why this brave man deserves all the admiration and attention we can give him. I hope you enjoy the concert.

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*. His one-man play, *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 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.

Timothy Steele (Piano) Mr. Steele is an active vocal coach, collaborative pianist, and conductor, and has taught for twenty-six years on the opera faculty at New England Conservatory. He has served as assistant conductor/pianist for over 180 productions with twenty-five opera companies, including Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Boston Lyric Opera, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, Wolf Trap Opera, Central City Opera, and PORT Opera. He assisted with the Pulitzer Prize winning opera *MADAME WHITE SNAKE* for productions in Boston and Taiwan and the *OUROBOROS TRILOGY* in 2016. For three years, he collaborated with WaterFire-Providence on a unique and popular series of opera evenings. In Boston he has performed with Emmanuel Music, the Handel and Haydn Society, and the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, among others.

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