

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Nicholas Howe, Piano

Heron Theatre, Beetham, Milnthorpe, Cumbria. Friday, September 13, 2019

Greetings, and Welcome. Cast your mind back to the campaign for the leadership of the Conservative Party a few months ago, and the moment the leading candidate described what he did to relax. He made and painted model buses out of wooden crates, complete with “happy passengers.” All in the past tense, of course, because he patently doesn’t have much spare time at the moment; and depending on next week’s Supreme Court ruling, the bus-production line planned for this five-week period may have to be rethought. Such is the uncertainty of the times. The “bus crash” of the Johnson premiership should hardly come as a surprise, considering the numerous alleged character flaws that were repeatedly flagged up by many commentators and onlookers as possible disqualifiers for the post. Somehow, we got him as the national bus driver. In other countries, we find that questionable intellect, probity or morality do not necessarily prevent some of the most dangerous people from arriving at the top of the political ladder. Meanwhile, those buildings designed to hold such people – prisons – often contain many who ought to be celebrated for their service to society. One thinks of the likes of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, whose crimes were bringing to world attention the malign practices of the governments and armies that continue to cause untold misery and destruction around the world. It is therefore strange that mainstream media (and so many ordinary citizens) still dismiss so out-of-hand the possibility that people like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders should be thought of as potential leaders of their countries. The greatest disqualifying factor in both cases is their open embrace of Democratic Socialism - that evil doctrine which dictates (undemocratically) that we must create “... a world where people, whether white or black or brown, can live in peace and harmony and where resources can be used for the good of all, for the advancement of mankind.” That is an extract from a speech made by Paul Robeson in 1945, apparently shocking his audience by also advocating peaceful coexistence with the USSR at the time. He was so popular among the Left in the US that many suggested he run for Vice President under the Progressive Party ticket. He dismissed the idea out-of-hand, and many then (as now) would have found the prospect laughable. His time was much better served in using his art, as he said, as his weapon in defence of his people and all oppressed people of the world. With things as serious as climate crisis to address, that is surely a very much more useful skill than making phantom buses out of wooden crates. 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 the Harare International Festival of the Arts in May 2018.

Nick Howe, Piano. After leaving college, Nick taught in the South Ribble area for thirty years, during which time he played for the Guild Singers in Chorley and as many as four local Gilbert & Sullivan societies, playing every single one of the G&S operas several times in the process. He accompanied Preston Opera for fifteen years under five musical directors, and continues to play in the Opera orchestra. More recently he has been playing keyboard synthesizer for musical societies around Lancashire, and for the Blackpool Symphony Orchestra.

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: *Showcase* (Soho Theatre); *Arawa* (Mboka Festival); *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* (Producer 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, Arcola); 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 senior lecturer at St Mary's University, 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, Set & Costume Designer. Phil's recent Design credits include: *Cinderella* (MAC, Stoke-on-Trent), *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, Shakespeare 4 Kidz), 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. He has also designed the multi-award-winning monodrama *Call Mr Robeson*, *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 award-winning international 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 2015, he has been the Resident Creative Designer at Colour House Children's Theatre nr 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: Sept 14: Llanbedr Village Hall, **Crickhowell, Wales;**
Sept 26, 27: Theatr Clwyd, **Mold, Wales; Oct 26:** Littleport Library, **Camb.**

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: Sept 28: Theatr Clwyd, **Mold, Wales**

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