

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Meryn Williams, Piano
Llanbedr Village Hall, Crickhowell, Powys, Wales. Saturday 14 September, 2019

Greetings, and Welcome. David Cameron's memoirs are out, and are being serialised in The Times. That is the top news item today – more so even (thank goodness) than #45's antics across the pond, including the fact that thanks to him, victims of the catastrophic hurricane that pulverised the Bahamas last week are being denied entry to the United States, because "there are some very bad people ... in the Bahamas." The sad thing is that for the remainder of his term, there are going to be more examples of such inhumanity in response to inevitable future natural (but man-made) disasters. But back to Mr. Cameron – what will be his legacy? Brexit apart, one that perhaps gets forgotten more than it should is his leading other NATO members in the bombing of Libya, in a bid to effect regime change over there. The chaos that ensued, which to this day continues to manifest itself in the collapse of Libya's economy, lawlessness and violence, literal enslavement of African migrants there, the destabilisation of North Africa, and a cross-Mediterranean refugee crisis which was one of the factors exploited by those wanting to "take back control of our borders" during the Brexit debate. It could also be argued that had it not been for what happened in Libya, Russia might not have been so keen to intervene in Syria, to counter continued Western interference there. This brings to mind a speech that Paul Robeson made in New York in 1947, in which he said, "*Mr. Bevan [The British Foreign Minister] must be totally blind if he cannot see that the absence of peace in the world is due precisely to the efforts of the British, American and other imperialist powers to maintain their control over the peoples of the Middle East, Europe and Africa.*" Such perceptiveness was however largely ignored, and often used against Robeson, and the media and politicians convinced the people that he was part of a plot to violently overthrow the government of the United States. Despite this, his own legacy, compared to that of many politicians, is incredibly impressive, as reflected in the hundreds of buildings, streets, and even a Russian mountain and an heirloom black tomato (!) named after him; in present-day artist/activists like Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Danny Glover and Spike Lee, for whom he paved the way; inspiring a number of plays, of which this is one; and having shown, as exemplified by his relationship with the Welsh, an appreciation of our common humanity and a demonstration of the goodness in humankind. It is a goal of most people, by which they are often judged after they have gone, that they leave the world a better place than how they found it. In Paul Robeson's case, there is no doubt that he did that, notwithstanding how little he features in general public consciousness 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 the Harare International Festival of the Arts in May 2018.

Meryn Williams, Piano. After graduating from Cardiff University Meryn has spent much of her time as an accompanist and amateur. She was the winner of the Morfydd Owen prize and Associate of the London College of Music and was accompanist at the Stuart Burrows masterclasses. Meryn is the accompanist for Wales West and Channel Islands for the Royal Academy of Dance London. She is currently leading the Newport Gwanwyn project and is musical director of two choirs.

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 26, 27: Theatr Clwyd, **Mold, Wales;** **Oct 26:** Littleport Library, **Cambs.**

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

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