

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Paul Wardell, Piano

Y Plas, Machynlleth, Wales. Friday 6 December, 2019

Greetings, and Welcome. Few people will see much of a connection between the two big news stories of the last week. First came the terrorist attack on London Bridge, and as the Prime Minister was still trying to blame Labour and its leader for the failures in the criminal justice system that led to a misguided “lone wolf” killing two young Brits, he was welcoming leaders of the NATO alliance to discuss its future in an increasingly dangerous world. Given the magnitude of the death, destruction and chaos that NATO action has been party to since its inception (Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya most recently), some would find it ridiculous to consider the two matters together. Unless you are Jeremy Corbyn, that is. It was he who received some criticism (what’s new?) for daring to suggest that some of the responsibility for the actions of the London terrorist should be borne by those who have caused trillions to be spent prosecuting wars in places far away from Europe, often with spurious justification (and certainly not for oil), leaving immeasurable death, destruction, anguish and bitterness in their wake, abroad and at home. As the alliance contemplates how to legitimately expand its role and prepare for possible military conflict with China too, voices of restraint continue to be drowned out by those more interested in ever expanding militarism. Mr. Corbyn’s quiet intervention is reminiscent of the thoughts and warnings of Paul Robeson several decades ago. He found himself increasingly isolated when he cautioned against the cooling of relations between the former allies: the USSR and the USA. And in a 1947 speech, he said, *“A day or two ago, the British Foreign Minister said, and I quote, ‘If we do not want total war, we must have total peace.’ For once, I agree with him. But Mr. Bevin 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.”* The absence of security on our streets here in the UK can partly be attributed to the same imperialist and war-mongering causes; and as we are being asked to choose between party leaders, I would certainly prefer a man who, when not advocating peace and cooperation, in his spare time plants vegetables, fruits and flowers, to one who makes model buses (which we are yet to see) and takes private “lessons” and “instruction” from visiting blonde Americans. 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 and solo roles in operas, musicals and oratorios. *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, and has taken him as far afield as the North West Territories of Canada and Australia and New Zealand, including New York’s Carnegie Hall. 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. He was one of a group of ten “outstanding writers of colour” invited to write and perform responses to artefacts held in Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum in September 2019.

Paul Wardell, Piano. Paul began learning the piano and singing in church choirs at the age of seven before progressing to the organ. His first appointment as organist and choir director was at the age of 15; this was followed by study at Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam Universities leading to a career in secondary education spanning over 30 years, including further study at the universities of Nottingham and Cardiff. Paul was a conductor, musical director, accompanist and organist in Grimsby, Sheffield, Plymouth, Peterborough, Cambridge and Lincoln before moving to mid Wales where he continues to work as an organist, conductor, accompanist and teacher.

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: Feb 1: Bishop Center, **Aberdeen, WA, USA;**
March 3: The Miners Theatre, **Ammanford, Carmathenshire**

Tayo Aluko & Friends

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