

## **CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.**

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Rowland Cotterill, Piano**  
**St. Andrews Sports & Community Centre, Handsworth, Birmingham**  
**Saturday 29 February, 2020**

**Greetings, and Welcome.** Thank You for bravely joining this gathering today, despite wall-to-wall coverage of a certain killer virus. We are smug about the freedom of press we enjoy here, but it is sometimes healthy to be sceptical, and to look out for what is missing. Month after month after month up until last December, we were inundated with stories about anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, leading to many suspensions and expulsions, and contributing to their defeat in the last elections. Even though the leader remains in place for now, the issue has receded somewhat. About a week ago, we heard that a report into the Windrush scandal may have been altered, and would not call the Home Office institutionally racist after all. That story has also receded, but the fact remains that deportations of innocent Black Britons continue. Some are dying through anxiety or suicide, but mainstream media, it seems, have moved on. Journalism had one of its finest hours when *the Guardian* and the *Washington Post* published information provided to them by Edward Snowden about wholesale electronic surveillance by the authorities and tech companies. *Wikileaks* provided a similar service by publishing explosive information received from Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning about horrible things being done by governments around the world. Their founder, Julian Assange, is currently fighting extradition to the USA at Woolwich Crown Court, and the hearings, according to some reports, are being conducted in the atmosphere of a “kangaroo court” that might make some foreign dictators blush. These reports aren’t coming from professional journalists (have you heard them on the BBC?) but from one Craig Murray ([www.craigmurray.org.uk](http://www.craigmurray.org.uk)) who paints a sordid picture from the public gallery. And some of you may have seen a recent documentary on Netflix: *Who Killed Malcolm X?* which shows how the NYPD and the FBI were allegedly at least partly responsible for his death. This information comes thanks to the dogged work of a single member of the public refusing to accept the narrative that has been spun. Forty two years after Paul Robeson’s death, one might see how he was also the victim of malevolent media manipulation. With any luck, we won’t have to wait that long to answer the question as to who carried out the political assassination of Jeremy Corbyn, and in the process almost killed the Labour Party. There are thankfully still some good journalists who could help reveal the truth. 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.

**Rowland Cotterill** trained as organist, pianist and song accompanist during his study in Cambridge, and has given recitals in Coventry Cathedral, King’s College Cambridge, and at the University of Warwick, where he lectured for many years in English and in the History of Music. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and an Associate of the Royal Schools of Music. He has directed shows ranging from Shakespeare to Hare, and worked as musical director in productions of Gilbert and Sullivan and of Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*.

**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: March 3:*** The Miners Theatre, **Ammanford, Wales;**

**March 14:** Dragon Theatre, **Barmouth, Wales; May 13:** Morganstown Village Hall, **Cardiff, Wales**

***Just An Ordinary Lawyer: June 18:*** **Ysgol Aberconwy, Wales.**

***June 19:*** **Histon Library, Cambridgeshire, UK**

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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