

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Roland Perrin, Piano**

**Greenwich Theatre, London. Saturday 12 June, 2021**

**Greetings, and Welcome.** It's great to be back! Fifteen months ago to the day, practically, almost to the day, I would have been performing this play in Wales, and that was the first of my performances to have been cancelled. It's been a hard road since then, but not as hard as the one trod by Paul Robeson, who once spent eight long years under effective home arrest, unable to act, sing, travel – indeed to earn a living at all. The idea then was to either beat him into submission and to tow the line the Establishment expected of him, or to consign him to obscurity forever. Yet here we are, 44 years after his death, sharing his story, and what an inspiration it is. Putting it simply, his having gone through what he did and then to return to continue a successful career for another five years, puts the last fifteen months into perspective. It also puts into context the last six years: the time it has taken to completely assassinate the character of another popular socialist individual, and attempt to consign him to history. As we continue to suffer the effects of the Tory government's mishandling of the pandemic and the diversion of billions of tax-payer funds into the coffers of private companies, it is interesting to note how completely the name of Jeremy Corbyn has been obliterated from mainstream newspapers and airwaves. Even Labour Party MPs, if they ever mention him at all, they do so only to explain why the party is not performing as well in the polls as it should be, even though it has had a new leader for twelve whole months. They would like us to forget the fact that Labour became the largest party in Europe under Corbyn, thanks mainly to the way he communicated his socialist ideals, not least of which was protecting and prioritising the National Health Service. Now, Labour not only continues to haemorrhage members, it even struggles to justify its very existence as it fails to perform the simple function of providing active opposition to the sitting government. We now have to wait for the next true socialist to lead Labour or another party and give us the chance of having the kind of government that truly has a chance of putting people before profit. When he or she comes along, we will hopefully be better able to see through the lies that will be inevitably manufactured to discredit and sabotage them. 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. 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 created a piece titled *WHAT HAPPENS?*, featuring the writings of African American Langston Hughes, performed with live jazz accompaniment. He has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana*, *Searchlight Magazine*, *Counterfire* and *Counterpunch*. His play *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* has been performed on three continents, and deals with Black liberation struggles around the world. 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. He recently premiered a radio play, *PAUL ROBESON'S LOVE SONG*, recorded during lockdown with actors from the USA and Canada, now streaming online through African Theatre to Your Home.

**Roland Perrin, Piano.** Born in New York, pianist Roland Perrin spent his childhood roaming the planet with his itinerant family. Eventually settling in London, Roland has established himself as one of the foremost musicians working in the jazz and world music areas. He has toured and recorded with Dudu Pukwana, Najma Aktar, Moses Fan-Fan, Aster Aweke and many others, including his own Blue Planet Orchestra. In 2015, he had a major work for choir, jazz band, solo singer and narrator, commissioned by Crouch End Festival Chorus, titled *Lansky, The Mob's Money Man*, which was premiered at the Southbank Centre in London. In July this year another major commission, *Rio Amazonas*, for chorus and orchestra, was premiered at London's Barbican Centre.

**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 design credits include: *Aladdin & Cinderella* (MAC, Stoke-on-Trent), *The Little Mermaid*, *Pinocchio*, *The Wonderful World of Oz* and *The Tempest*, *Around the World in 80 Days & Jungle Book* (Elgiva), *Bernarda Alba*, *Saint/Jeanne & Spring Awakening* (Chelsea), *Kwaidan* (UK/International tour), *Sister Act*, *Gypsy*, *Carousel*, *Hairspray & Cabaret* (Amersham College) and a huge walk-through Xmas Grotto at Wyevale Garden Centre in 2017. He has designed *High Life* (Hampstead), *Coming Up for Air* (UK tour), *The Playground* (Polka) and *Ma Joyce's Tales from the Parlour* (Oval House/Edinburgh). Further credits include: *Lord of the Flies* (Colet Court), *Dance or Die* (Avant Garde Dance), *Voices in the Alleyway & Yes, I Still Exist* (Spread Expression Dance), *The Riddle of the Sands & Laurel and Hardy* (Jermyn St), *The Famous Five* (Tabard), open-air tours of *The Merchant of Venice & The Railway Children* (Heartbreak) and the original multi award-winning international touring production of John Retallack's *Hannah & Hanna*. Phil is an Associate Artist of Gbemisola Ikumelo's Faith Drama, for whom he has designed *Custody* (Oval House), *The Fiddler* (Unicorn) and *Next Door* (Cockpit). Since 2016, he has been Resident Designer at Colour House Children's Theatre nr Wimbledon where he has now designed over 24 shows in addition to writing musical adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Hansel & Gretel* and, most recently, *Red Riding Hood*. Phil has won several awards at film festivals around the world for his Production, Set & Costume Design work on Reeltime Productions' 2019 Doctor Who spin-off drama, *Sil and the Devil Seeds of Arodor*.

**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:**

**Just An Ordinary Lawyer: June 13:** Greenwich Theatre, London

### **Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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