

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Andy Davies, Piano

Liverpool's Royal Court Theatre. Friday, November 26, 2021

Greetings, and Welcome. Aren't human-traffickers awful people? Isn't it the height of irresponsibility for those illegal migrants to risk the lives of their women and children on these deathly crossings? Why aren't the French doing more, and why don't they accept our government's offer of British personnel to help patrol the French coast? Interesting questions, of course, but there are others that could be asked, such as: What is it that those people are fleeing so desperately? Do our current and previous governments have any role in creating the conditions that they are fleeing from? Do draconian, racist anti-immigration policies not drive asylum-seekers and refugees into the hands of the traffickers? The answer to the last two questions is undoubtedly yes, but they seem to need to be asked again and again, lest we be diverted from holding to account people who pretend to serve us. Another question that can be asked is: What is going on as we are concentrating on the Channel tragedy. This week, a Health and Care Bill was passed in the House of Commons which has brought the privatisation of the NHS one step closer. Private American companies are among those lining up to start profiting from a reorganisation of the service into integrated care systems, which will partly be run by those unaccountable corporations. Also receding from public consciousness as we mourn the loss of those innocent lives, is the uproar caused by the announcement of proposals for the funding of social care for the elderly. As a result, wealthier people can relax, and poorer people worry about how they are going to meet care costs. Meanwhile the carers –on the frontline are among the worst paid people in the country. Without necessarily being the most erudite or well-informed pundit on these or other matters, one is moved to write such things by the example of the great Paul Robeson, who said the following in his time: *"It is my business not only to tell the guy with the whip hand to go easy on people, but also to teach my people—all the oppressed people—how to prevent that whip hand being used against them."* He had a huge platform, and as such was seen as incredibly dangerous, which is why so many people know nothing about him. May that yet change. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer. Nigerian-born and a former architect, Tayo has lived in Liverpool since 1989. 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 several 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. His radio play, *PAUL ROBESON'S LOVE SONG*, recorded during lockdown with actors from the US and Canada, now streams online.

Andy Davies, Piano. Andy is a Welsh pianist based in the North West. He studied Music at the University of Manchester and has since worked as a pianist and musical director across the country and abroad. Andy is accomplished in a variety of genres, from classical, to musical theatre, to pop, jazz and everything in between. His career has seen him perform as a soloist, an accompanist, in pit bands, function bands and on cruise ships. Andy thoroughly enjoys the variety of his career and has very much enjoyed working with Tayo.

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. Some voices in the HUAC scene used from *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?* by Eric Bentley, recorded by L A Theatre Works. **Male Voice Choir:** Liverpool Male Voice Choir

Forthcoming Performances Include:

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: November 27: Royal Court Theatre Studio, Liverpool.

Tayo Aluko & Friends

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