

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

**Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Josh Wood, Piano  
theSpace @ Surgeon's Hall. Edinburgh Fringe, 21 – 27 August, 2022**

Greetings, and Welcome. Considering the amount of litter on the otherwise beautiful streets of Edinburgh as a result of the ongoing bin strike, it is interesting to remember that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated when was in Memphis supporting striking sanitation workers, most of whom were Black. A few weeks after his demise, the city acceded to the strikers' demands, and officially recognised their union. That being 1968, it was a few decades after Paul Robeson had travelled around his country and Europe lending his own personal popularity and amazing voice to union causes, and being awarded honorary membership of many. He actually also inspired previously racist American unions not just to accept Black workers into their membership, but to their leadership as well. Robeson's ability to link workers' rights to racial issues in his country and abroad, and even to liberation struggles in colonies of European and American empires was far ahead of his time, and his popularising of the song *Joe Hill* is a reminder of how far back one can go to realise that those who help ordinary working people realise the immense strength they have when acting collectively, are always under threat, even of death. Hill's story is also a reminder of how dangerous it can be for those who have the ability to communicate ordinary workers' demands clearly and effectively, as one Jeremy Corbyn found out to his own detriment. We are witnessing similar attempts by the corporate media to paint Trade Union leaders like the RMT's Mick Lynch as the enemy of the people, but one gets the impression that Corbyn's example may be contributing, maybe even only subconsciously, to the public not accepting that narrative this time round. It seems that some kind of general strike could be underway in Britain, especially as the leadership of both major parties continue to demonstrate that the rights of working people are of little interest to them. What may fill the political vacuum is difficult to predict, but we are certainly headed for interesting times, during which we must continue to stand by the side of the workers. What is easier to predict is that the bins will be emptied again, and the streets of Edinburgh will be clean again soon, maybe before the end of the Fringe, but the public will be called on to support more strikes, and help make the walls of inequality and injustice come tumbling down, as they must. I hope you enjoy the show.

**Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer.** Nigerian-born and a former architect, Tayo now writes and acts fulltime on stage and screen. 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. His radio play, *PAUL ROBESON'S LOVE SONG*, recorded during lockdown with actors from the USA and Canada, now streams online, the next one being on September 4<sup>th</sup> - the anniversary of the second Peekskill riot.

**Josh Wood, Piano.** Josh Wood is an Edinburgh based pianist who has recently graduated from the university of St Andrews. Having previously played for, and musically directed numerous musical productions at the university, including *Sweeney Todd*, *Chicago*, and the *Pirates of Penzance* in the last 5 Years. He is delighted to return to theatre again this fringe.

**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. Here at the Fringe, she has directed another show, *Blood, Sweat & Vaginas*.

**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). He is 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*, and also at this year's Fringe, *Blood, Sweat & Vaginas*.

**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:**

**Call Mr. Robeson: Till Aug 27:** Edinburgh Fringe; **November 4:** Grove Theatre, Eastbourne

**Paul Robeson's Love Song: September 4:** Tayo Aluko's Zoom Room

**Just An Ordinary Lawyer: Till August 28:** C Place @ Edinburgh Fringe;

**October 17:** Birmingham Rep (Corporate event).

**Tayo Aluko & Friends**

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