

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko, with Meryn Williams, Piano

Pontypridd Library, Friday October 29, 2021

Greetings, and Welcome. On the drive down from Liverpool, I was reminded of the time, maybe fifteen years ago, when I sang at a wedding in a little chapel in a small village somewhere not too far from here. I was shocked to see a memorial plaque to a young soldier from the village who had died in a battle in Cameroon, West Africa, sometime in the 1890s. All this time later, I am that much more aware of the history, not just of British and other European powers sending young men, mostly from poor backgrounds, to kill and be killed in the service of Empire. There will undoubtedly be some in the audience tonight who have stories of family members lost in various wars abroad from then, to as recently as in Afghanistan. This most recent episode has most graphically been shown to have been a tremendous waste of resources and lives, started on a litany of lies. When Wikileaks released thousands of documents showing war crimes committed by soldiers - and just as importantly, by those who led us into war - in Iraq and Afghanistan (see for example "the collateral video" in Iraq, the truth was there all to see. Burying the truth has long been a skill of the Establishment, so much so that few will be aware that the founder of Wikileaks has been in maximum security prison in Belmarsh, London, for over two years. This week, the Royal Courts of Justice heard an appeal from the US Government against a January ruling stopping his extradition to the US on espionage charges. His crime was in fact journalism – exposing the truth. Another brilliant journalist, Craig Murray, is currently in jail in Scotland for reporting on a political persecution in Scotland, and Assange's unfair incarceration. What made Paul Robeson such a danger to the US Governments of his time that he was vilified in the press and also suffered a period of extreme persecution in his country. That such a popular entertainer who used his platform to expose the dishonesty and corruption of those in power could have been vilified and buried is a warning to us to be vigilant against the antics of our leaders, who are so brilliant at distracting us from what they are doing for the benefit of the few, and not the many. 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. His radio play, *PAUL ROBESON'S LOVE SONG*, recorded during lockdown with actors from the USA and Canada, now streams online.

Meryn Williams, Piano. After graduating from Cardiff University Meryn has spent much of her time as an accompanist and amateur. She was the winner of the Morfydd Owen prize and Associate of the London College of Music and was accompanist at the Stuart Burrows masterclasses. Meryn is the accompanist for Wales West and Channel Islands for the Royal Academy of Dance London. She is currently leading the Newport Gwanwyn project and is musical director of two choirs.

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:

Call Mr. Robeson: November 17: UCLan, Preston; **November 19:** Hull Truck Theatre;

November 26: Royal Court Theatre Studio, Liverpool

Just An Ordinary Lawyer: November 20: Hull Truck Theatre;

November 27: Royal Court Theatre Studio, Liverpool.

Paul Robeson's Love Song. November 13 & 14. Online. www.brownpapertickets.com

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