

JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER. A play, with songs.

Written and performed by Tayo Aluko, with David Dear, piano

Liverpool's Royal Court Theatre. Saturday, November 27, 2021

The British and French governments are at loggerheads again, sparked this time by the recent Channel disaster. The innocent lives lost would undoubtedly have included citizens of countries previously colonised by the two rivals. One is reminded of the fact that they were on opposite sides of the Nigerian Civil War, recalled in this play. In that conflict, Britain's Labour government sided with the Nigerian administration, secretly selling them arms in defiance of international conventions. France supported the underdogs, presumably hoping for favourable access to the oil that lay under Biafran soil. One of the weapons with which Nigeria forced the surrender of Biafra was starvation – stopping food supplies to innocent millions – again with the connivance of British Labour. As we wonder if and how the latest Covid variant (not to talk of further Brexit fall-out) might dampen Christmas cheer for us, our leaders are complicit in the starvation and deaths of Afghan people, by going along with the US blockade of the Taliban regime that they and their allies literally helped return to power. The looming famine in that country appears not to be of major concern to the leadership of either of the two main parties here, which some now describe as two cheeks of the same, er, backside. Britain's most distinguished Prime Minister, Churchill, and his cabinet, are blamed for being instrumental in the 1943 Bengal famine, because they insisted that food from that region was sent away to feed troops fighting in WWII. Decades after Indian independence, farmers have recently won a major victory against the current leader with a year-long protest against neo-liberal laws they claimed would have made them prone to exploitation. From an African perspective their action is inspiring, for it shows that even though the self-governance that millions fought and died for was hijacked by new oppressors of the same colour as the oppressed, the same collective and determined action on the ground that saw off the colonisers can once again transform our societies. That goes for this country too – for it is becoming clearer by the day that this rapacious, corrupt and racist government has no opposition in the Mother of all Parliaments. I hope you enjoy the show.

Tayo Aluko, Writer, Performer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, worked as an architect in Liverpool for many years. He has fronted orchestras as baritone soloist in concert halls, and has also performed lead roles in opera, musicals and oratorio. His first play, *CALL MR ROBESON* won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada. He delivers a lecture/concert called *PAUL ROBESON – THE GIANT, IN A NUTSHELL*, and another one titled *FROM BLACK AFRICA TO THE WHITE HOUSE*: a talk about Black Political Resistance, illustrated with spirituals. He researched, wrote and narrated to camera a piece on West African History before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which forms part of the permanent exhibit at Liverpool's International Slavery Museum. His 15-minute play, *HALF MOON*, which also deals with ancient Africa, has been performed several times in the UK. He has developed a piece titled *WHAT HAPPENS?* featuring the writings of African American Langston Hughes, for performance with live jazz accompaniment. He has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana*, *Searchlight Magazine*, *Counterfire* and *Counterpunch*. He was one of a group of "outstanding writers of colour" invited to write and perform responses to artefacts held in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum in September 2019. His latest production is a radio play, *PAUL ROBESON'S LOVE SONG*, recorded during lockdown with actors from the USA and Canada, and now streaming online. He is working on another one-man musical play, *COLERIDGE-TAYLOR OF FREETOWN*, inspired by the life and music of the Black British Composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. He has recently had two poems published, and developed one of them – "*GREATNESS*" *IN A TIME OF COVID* – into an online international performance and mapping project and a workshop examining colonial history. He is also working on a screenplay telling the story of Pastor Daniels Ekarte (d. 1964), known as the African Saint of Liverpool.

David Dear, Piano. David has lived and worked in Liverpool for over 30 years as a piano teacher and accompanist. He started playing piano at the age of seven, attended the Huddersfield School of Music and completed a Music Degree at the University of Liverpool. He taught music at a local Comprehensive school in Liverpool before establishing himself as a private piano teacher, and still enjoys working with schools such as King David High School and Bluecoat School. A skilled accompanist, he regularly works with students from the University of Liverpool and has performed in the University Lunchtime Recitals.

Amanda Huxtable, Director. Amanda has over 25 years of Creative practice experience in theatre and screen development. She is Co- Director at Vanitas Arts, working in development the executive team are leading research and practice into immersive digital storytelling from a diverse range of lived life experiences. **Theatre Credits:** *I leave you love* by Anita Franklin (In development with Vanitas Arts. *Everything I own* by Daniel Ward, Hull Truck Theatre, *Unknown* by Leanna Benjamin, Leeds Playhouse, *Hilda and the Northern Powerhouse* (Kate Hainsworth & Camille Hainsworth – Staples,), *Abigail's Party* (Hull Truck Theatre), *Bread and Roses* by Ian Kershaw (Oldham Coliseum), *Wondr* by Poppy Burton- Morgan (Metta Theatre, Edinburgh Festival), *Just an Ordinary Lawyer?* (Tayo Aluko), *Ladies of Situations*, (Seni Seneviratne and Vanitas Arts), *Bag Lady* by Marcia Layne (Hidden Gems). **Television;** Casting consultant for ITV Studios Coronation Streets – The Bailey's. Shadow Trainee Director on Emmerdale.

Emma Williams, Designer. Emma's recent design work includes "Jackie and the Beanstalk" Curly Tales, Leeds Playhouse, "Bad Blood Blues" Theatre Deli; "Shivers" Greenwich Theatre, national tour "The Netherlands" Two Tonne, Camden People's Theatre and touring ; "Shadows in Different Shades" Sheffield Crucible and Utopia; "Jack Frost" Barnsley Civic and "Birds Nest Billy" Fidget Theatre, national tour, "Abigail's Party" Hull Truck, "The Yellow Doctress," Hidden Gems, "HD100" for Chol at the Lawrence Batley Theatre, Terrace; "Huddersfield"; "The Dutiful Daughter"-co-production with Szechuan People's Theatre, both directed by Amanda Huxtable. "Iyalode of Eti", Utopia Theatre; "Molly's Marvellous Moustache", Fidget and "You Forgot the Mince" Imagine If. Designs for Leeds Playhouse between 2003-2015 include: "Immune"; "Nine Lives"; "Refugee Boy"; "You The Player" site specific co-production with Look Left Look Right; "Scuffer"; "Crap Dad"; "Two Tracks and Text Me"; "Runaway Diamonds"; "Broken Angel"; "Sunbeam Chengdu, China; "Coming Around Again"; "The Elves and The Shoemakers"; "Pinocchio"; "The Magic Paintbrush" and the original version of "The Yellow Doctress". Other designs include "One Among Millions", co-pro between RJC Youth Dance and Leeds University, 2016; "Brief Encounters @Bradford Interchange, a site-specific piece for Freedom Studios; "Strawberries in January" Traverse, Edinburgh; "The Shoe", Polka Theatre; "The Swing Left" Unlimited Theatre; "Small Objects of Desire"; Soho Theatre. Opera credits include: "The Soldier's Tale" Skipton Camerata, "Siroe" Royal College of Music; "Partenope"; "Admeto"; "Alceste" New Hall Cambridge. She also designs immersive sets for escape rooms and teaches and mentors young artists entering the industry, most recently as part of Northern Ballet's Cultural Runway collaboration with Burberry.

Dramaturgy: Esther Wilson; **Lighting Design:** Mark Loudon; **Sound Design:** Noel Inyang & Tayo Aluko

Tayo Aluko & Friends

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