

JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER. A play, with songs.

Written and performed by Tayo Aluko, with Sonum Batra, piano

We Move Summit, Runnymede Trust @ University of Leeds, 3 September 2022

Very many of us here have our origins in places that were colonised by British and/or other European powers, where our ancestors seemed almost powerless as the European elites exploited our lands, our people and our resources for the benefit of themselves and their home countries. Having won independence, it then took us several years or decades before it became clear that the foreign elites had only been replaced by local ones who to this day carry on the exploitation, for the benefit of themselves, and again, the same foreign countries and elites from whom they learned the chicanery. Though set in the middle to latter part of the last century, this play reminds us of the struggles that were waged in order to rid the people of Africa and the Diaspora of the burden of exploitation, as well as of the lengths to which the Establishment went to paint those that struggle as troublemakers, terrorists or whatever. As we watch things around the world being as bad, and in some cases, worse, than they were in previous decades, we realise that it is clearer now than it has ever been, that in this country as well as other major powers, the same thing pertains: we have a small elite exploiting the vast majority of people, and are now beginning to do so with as much audacity, arrogance and shamelessness as happens in the parts of the world that they are so quick to criticise. With that increased knowledge (which is sometimes easy to forget with the propaganda that the media continues to feed us) comes increased militancy, and some of us artists seek to play our part by telling stories such as the ones we are sharing today, in a bid to encourage us all to appreciate the strength we have when acting collectively, in solidarity with one another, and in rallying behind the truly radical leaders who help us see the promised land and defeat our oppressors. Some of those leaders, as in earlier times, will be scandalised and even assassinated (even if only in the political sense) but we should be ready to rally behind those who replace them, for you can kill a revolutionary, but you cannot kill an idea whose time has come. 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 *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*. 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, 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.

Sonum Batra, Piano. Sonum studied music at King's College London, specialising in piano and composition. Recent credits as MD/pianist include: Aladdin (Buxton Opera House), Just an Ordinary Lawyer (Hull Truck), The Railway Children (Hull Truck Theatre), Dick Whittington (Grange Theatre), Arabian Nights (Hoxton Hall), Relativity (Finborough Theatre), Aladdin (Embassy Theatre), Not the End of the World (Edinburgh Fringe), Bend it Like Beckham (workshop, Dominion Theatre), Bring on the Bollywod (Belgrade Theatre), His Indian Boyfriend (Stratford East Theatre), Kat in Kixx (Stratford East Theatre), John and Jen (Rosemary Branch), Swallows and Amazons (Bristol Old Vic), They're Playing Our Song (Catford Broadway), A Midsummer Night's Dream (Warhorse Theatre Works). She also regularly teaches piano and singing and as audition pianist/accompanist she works nationwide.

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

Forthcoming Performances Include: October 17: Birmingham Rep (Corporate event).

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

Call Mr. Robeson: November 4: Grove Theatre, Eastbourne

Tayo Aluko & Friends

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