

I think it should be fairly uncontroversial to state that most of humanity is being run by people least fit to hold the positions they hold. Perhaps the starkest, clearest current example of this is in Israel, where the prime minister, while desperately trying to thwart the legal process that would rightfully convict him of gross corruption (allegedly) gets into bed with self-described neo-fascists, homophobes and white-supremacists and then proceeds to unleash genocide of hitherto unseen proportions in modern times on an innocent people trapped in an open-air prison. The excuse given – the Hamas attacks of October 7 – are, to all but the self-deluding, a smokescreen for the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza strip (and presumably thereafter the West Bank) of Palestinians, so that the European-descended can finally have for themselves all the territory “from the river to the sea.” This criminal enterprise is being supported too by leaders in the West, not a single one of whom can be described as an “honest broker.” The word “war criminal” will certainly be applicable to more than one of those, as to their predecessors, including at least one recent former British PM (and there are so many more before him). It’s the same practically all over the world, and yet, for now, there seems to be little that citizens can do, what with the way the so-called democratic systems and media are controlled by those who benefit from the horrible status-quo. Defiance and resistance are therefore some of the last weapons at our disposal, sometimes through art. Nobody demonstrated this better than Paul Robeson, whose story we are sharing tonight, and his performance in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee is nothing short of inspirational. His preparedness to lose his livelihood and freedom is what inspired me to join Palestine Action, an organisation which targets an Israeli-owned arms factory with several bases around the UK. As a result of that, I stand before you a convicted criminal, and a proud one too, as the kinds of people who have been criminalised include the likes of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr and a host of others too numerous to mention. As we watch war crimes continue on our screens tonight, I as an artist and activist can do worse than to urge people here to look up palestineaction.org and consider joining in an action that disrupts, however briefly, that war pipeline that is decimating the people of Palestine. The vast majority of people who get involved in such actions do not get a conviction, but if it does come to you, it’ll be something you can wear with pride, and you can say it was inspired by Paul Robeson.

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. *CALL MR ROBESON* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, and continues to be performed after 16 years. His other play, *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* has itself been performed for He delivers a number of lecture/concerts and talks on Black Political Resistance using art and song. 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 writer 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. His third one-man musical play (a work in progress), is *COLERIDGE-TAYLOR OF FREETOWN*, inspired by the life and music of the Black British Composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. He is also working on a screenplay telling the story of Pastor Daniels Ekarte (d. 1964), known as the African Saint of Liverpool.

Philbert So, piano. Philbert started learning the piano when he was 4 and the violin at 6. He achieved Grade 8 Piano before he left Hong Kong at the age of 14, and continued his studies in the UK. In the same year as he was doing his A-levels, he achieved Piano DipABRSM under the tutelage of Matthew Kam, as well as grade 8 Violin and Grade 7 Flute which he picked up along the way. Now a full-time engineer, he still actively engages in music in the form of tuition at his home in Chatteris. He still misses performing, which is why he started a YouTube channel, and why he was pleased to accept Mr. Aluko’s invitation to join him in *Call Mr. Robeson*.

Call Mr. Robeson was premiered at C-Soco at the Edinburgh Fringe on August 12, 2007, with Michael Conliffe accompanying Tayo Aluko then, and for several years thereafter.

Director and Dramaturge: Olusola Oyeleye.

Set & Costume Designer: Phil Newman.

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

Future Performances include:

8 November: Call Mr. Robeson. St. Neots Library, Cambs

28 Aug 2024: Call Mr. Robeson. North American Festival of Wales, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

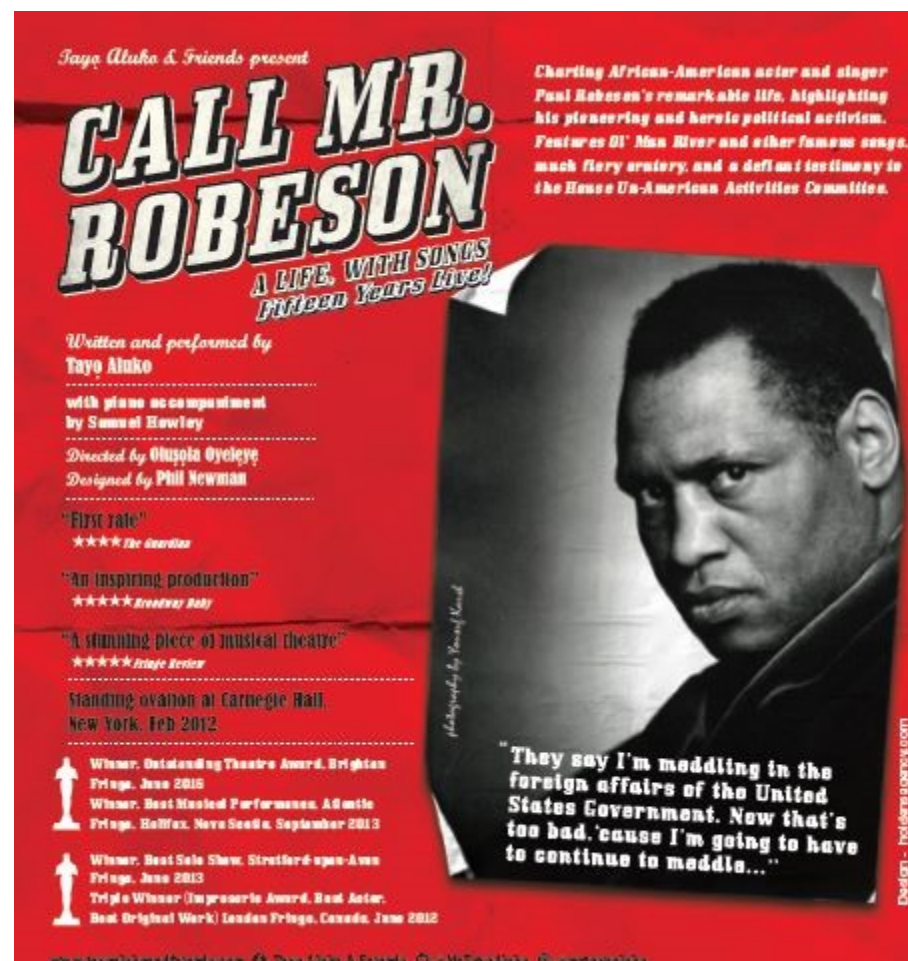
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Written and performed by Tayo Aluko
Accompanied by Philbert So

Art & Soul Café, St. Neots,
Cambridgeshire
Wednesday 8 November, 2023