

The tragedy in Myanmar and Indonesia is truly shocking. The devastation and suffering are literally unimaginable, and were we not seeing the images ourselves, it would be unbelievable. To make matters worse, the Myanmar regime, we hear, is not allowing foreign journalists into the country, so despite what we see, hear and know, the death toll is almost certainly much worse than the official figures given. We hear also of the scandal of poorly-built (by Chinese companies) sky scrapers and the fact that it took days for the Myanmar junta to declare a ceasefire in the civil war that had already been plaguing the people for years. One is reminded of the time another terrible earthquake struck the beleaguered country of Haiti in 2010, as if life before that disaster wasn't already bad enough. And still the vultures swooped in from the West, and fed even more on the people's suffering – something that had been going on before and since those enslaved on the island fought a long and bloody war against armies from France, Spain, the United States and Britain, eventually liberating themselves. It is a rather British thing to point at people on the other side of the world and highlight their democratic failings, or the suppression of free speech or the press; as if to say that things here are perfect, or that this country or her leaders are - and have always been - honest brokers. There is also the selectivity with which criticism is levelled. The acres of rubble that we see in the Far East, caused by a so-called act of God, are hardly different from what has been created in parts of the Middle East (particularly Gaza) by the Israeli Occupation Forces, with Western-supplied weapons. Yet our leaders – on both sides of the aisle – say that the carnage is justified. Part of the justification is said to be the widespread sexual violence perpetrated against women and children by Hamas operatives in October 2023. Evidence of that is, as far as I am aware, questionable at best, yet credible and undeniable reports and footage of almost industrial-scale sexual violence against Palestinian women (and men) that has been going on for months is brushed under the carpet by Western media. This play is about how the history of an African country, and the greed and corruption of its leaders all lead to war, and how women inevitably suffer particular abuse. As we know all too well from sex scandals even in the Church here and elsewhere, nobody can claim with any legitimacy to be “Holier (or Better) than Thou,” and when our leaders and media try to tempt us into thinking that way, we should not lose sight of the fact that they are probably trying to distract us from the awful abuse they are inflicting on us, and others elsewhere.

Tayo Aluko. Writer, Performer, Producer. Tayo was born in Nigeria, and worked as an architect in Liverpool for 15 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* has won numerous awards at festivals in the UK and Canada, and continues to be performed after 17 years. His second, *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* has been performed internationally for since 2016. He delivers a number of lecture/concerts and talks on Black political resistance using art and song. He researched, wrote and narrated on film a piece on West African History before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, that is 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. Publishers of his writing include *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, *NERVE Magazine*, *Modern Ghana*, *Searchlight Magazine*, *Counterfire* and *Counterpunch*. His audio play, *PAUL ROBESON'S LOVE SONG*, recorded during lockdown with actors from the USA and Canada, is now streaming online. His next project is likely to be a screenplay telling the story of Nigerian, Pastor Daniels Ekarte (d. 1964), known as the African Saint of Liverpool. With Rebekah Okpoti, he is planning a day-long Coleridge-Taylor Festival in Liverpool in October.

Rebekah Okpoti, Piano. Dr Rebekah Okpoti is an academic, organist and content creator known as The Girly Organist. Rebekah was a student at Chetham's School of Music then, studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, before completing her PhD at the University of Central Lancashire. She holds a lectureship at Liverpool Hope University and is Deputy Organist at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. Rebekah has worked in Anglican, Catholic and Evangelical Church Music; as Director of Music at Lancaster Priory; as an Associate Organist at Leeds Cathedral, and in various National Church outreach programmes. In 2022 she was awarded an honorary Fellowship by the National College of Music and Arts for her work as The Girly Organist in inspiring Organists old and new around the UK. Rebekah is the editor of the UK's second largest specialist Organ magazine *The Organ Manual*.

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR OF FREETOWN

The play was premiered at Rotunda Theatre at the Brighton Fringe
on May 10, 2024

With Allison Devenish on piano

Director: Mojisola Kareem

Set & Costume Designer: Phil Newman

Sound Design: Liam McDermott

Lighting Design: Tayo Aluko

Dramaturgs: Esther Wilson and Jennifer Farmer

Dance/Movement Dramaturg: Funmi Adewole

Arrangement of *Rise Up, Mother Africa!*: Deirdre Pascall

(Words and melody by Tayo Aluko)

Recorded Voices: Julius Obende, Dorcas Seb, Tayo Aluko, others.

Opening poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Song settings to poetry by:

Kathleen Easmon (*Big Lady Moon, When We're Left Alone With Mother*), Paul Laurence Dunbar (*Candle Lightin' Time, Who Knows?*) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (*Hiawatha's Vision*), Sarojini Naidoo (*A Lovely Little Dream*), Christina Rossetti (*When I am Dead, My Dearest*), Ella Wheeler Wilcox (*O Praise Me Not*), Tayo Aluko (*Rise Up, Mother Africa!*)

Future Performances include:

April 5. Call Mr. Robeson @ Highfield Trinity Church, Sheffield

June 19. Call Mr. Robeson @ Raretan Valley Community College,
New Jersey USA

June 24. Coleridge-Taylor of Freetown @ The Bus Stop Theatre,
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

October 11. Coleridge-Taylor of Freetown @ The Capstone Theatre,
Liverpool (Part of a Coleridge-Taylor Festival)

Tayo Aluko & Friends

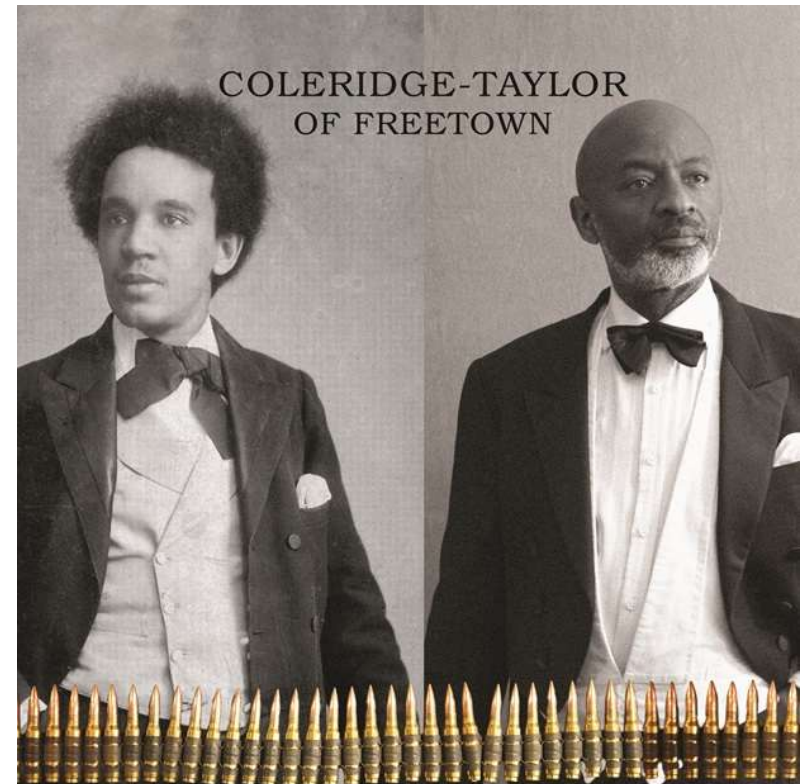
Liverpool L15 3LA

info@tayoalukoandfriends.com www.tayoalukoandfriends.com

facebook: Tayo Aluko & Friends Twitter: @MrTayoAluko

instagram: mrtayoaluko tel: +44 7990 608 074

Tayo Aluko & Friends
and Utopia Theatre
Present



Written and Performed by
Tayo Aluko

With Rebekah Okpoti, Piano

Hawthorn Village Hall, Leeds
Thursday, 3 April, 2025