

Greetings, and welcome. A month ago today, I was due to perform this play in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for the North America Festival of Wales. Sadly, I didn't make it there, because I was unable to get a work visa in time. Apparently, although identical applications had previously been successful, some documentation was deemed to be missing from this one, without it being made clear what it was. The frustration was assuaged somewhat by my meeting a young lady at a party I was therefore able to attend the following week. She told me how she had seen my play in 2015, and it had made her change the focus of the PhD she had just started, and it continues to influence what she now teaches as a senior lecturer at Goldsmith's College, London. Paul Robeson's story changed her life much as it changed mine, and will change those of several of her students. The immigration officer who was seemingly so reluctant to help me fulfil my engagement will probably never experience the joy I received from that one interaction. Some people have expressed suspicion that Robeson's politics might have had something to do with my predicament. Others wonder whether it is my own activism on behalf of Palestinians (which necessitates criticising US, British and other administrations, and indeed joining in some direct actions with the group Palestine Action (palestineaction.org)), who bypass politicians and disrupt the conveyor belt of armaments manufactured in this country and shipped over to the Israeli occupying forces to kill tens of thousands of civilians in occupied Palestine. Several protestors are in jail right now in the UK for direct action, and journalists have in recent months been arrested under the Terrorism Act. Meanwhile, a man declared a war criminal is allowed to travel freely to the United Nations and make speeches justifying a spreading genocide, and evading arrest. Why do I bother? Why take the risk? Paul Robeson lost his passport, his income and his mental health. People in Palestine and Lebanon have lost and continue to lose infinitely more, but they continue to resist with such bravery and dignity. Their stories are inspiring, and lead one to say, like Robeson did, "The artist must take sides ...I have made my choice. I had no alternative."

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 in demand 16 years since its premiere. His second play, *JUST AN ORDINARY LAWYER* is itself 8 years old, and has been performed on three continents. 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 audio 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, *COLERIDGE-TAYLOR OF FREETOWN*, inspired by the life and music of the Black British Composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, premiered in Brighton in May. He is also working on a screenplay telling the story of Pastor Daniels Ekarte (d. 1964), known as the African Saint of Liverpool.

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.

Call Mr. Robeson was premiered at C-Soco at the Edinburgh Fringe on August 12, 2007, with Michael Conliffe on piano

Tayo Aluko & Friends
Present

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 LA Theatre Works.

Male Voice Choir: Liverpool Male Voice Choir

Future Performances include:

October 11: Participant, Gaza Nights 3 Unity Theatre Liverpool

October 17: Reading of extracts from new book at BHM event: The Persecution of the Black Community in Nazi Germany. Lambeth Town Hall, London

October 19. Coleridge-Taylor of Freetown Wellingborough African Caribbean Association, Northamptonshire

October 20. Call Mr. Robeson Narth Village Hall, Wales

October 23. Concert: Black Activist Song Cycle.

St. George's Hall, Liverpool

November 22. Just An Ordinary Lawyer Exeter University

November 23. Just An Ordinary Lawyer Dragon Theatre, Barmouth, Wales

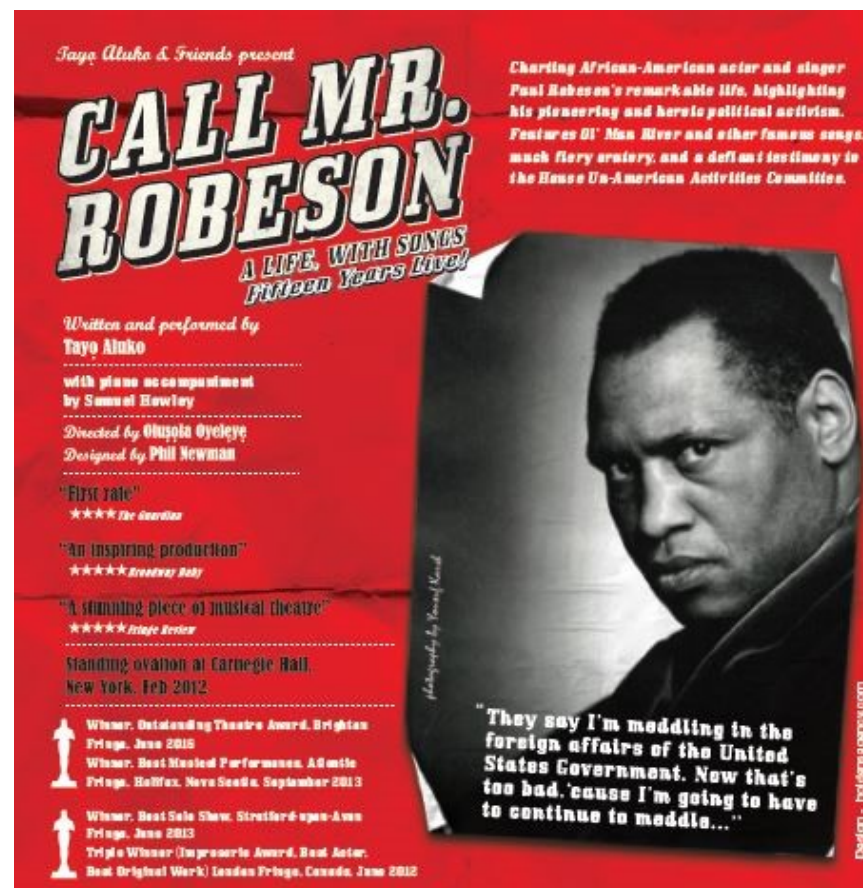
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Written and performed by Tayo Aluko
Accompanied by
Meryn Williams

St. Elvan's Church
Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan
Saturday, 28 September, 2024