

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) first encountered Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* as a student at the Royal College of Music. By the time *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* was premiered there, the recent graduate, though famous, was still only 23. Having received eleven guineas for the copyright, the huge profits that his most successful work generated would not be shared by the composer. I don't know whether Novello ever atoned for this, but it can't be controversial to suggest that reparations are due, one way or another. So is the case with the relationship between Coleridge-Taylor's father's home country and continent, and the West, and this is one of the main themes of *Coleridge-Taylor of Freetown*. A related theme is that of rape: something endured not just by Mother Africa, but universally, and most rampantly in times of war. That the play's victim (and ultimately, survivor) is a young student is poignant, because as we see today, students often illuminate the ugliness, corruptness, cynicism and inhumanity of our leaders, at the risk of state violence, and even death. That is as true in Africa as it is in Western so-called democracies, with the US being the pig wearing the most outlandish amounts of lurid lipstick. As general elections loom on both sides of the Atlantic, the calibre of the frontrunners makes one despair, and Longfellow's words from *Hiawatha*, sung in this play, couldn't be more apt or prescient:

"Then a darker, drearier vision / Passed before me, vague and cloud-like / I beheld our nation scattered / All forgetful of my counsels / Weakened, warring with each other / Saw the remnants of our people Sweeping westward, wild and woful"

Retelling stories told to the poet by Indigenous Americans, and predicting the impending lethal descent of "The White Man's Foot," an 1855 *New York Times* reviewer opined that *Hiawatha* was "entitled to commendation" for "embalming pleasantly enough the monstrous traditions of ... **a justly exterminated race**. As a poem, it deserves no place" because there "is no romance about the Indian." Substitute "Indian" for "African" or "Palestinian" and you see how mainstream politics and media can feel justified in considering the words "Holocaust" and "Genocide" as applying only to early-20th-Century European Jews. It also explains why we hear little or nothing of the systematic rape of Palestinian women that is undoubtedly happening now. By contrast we continue to be fed stories (said to be largely uncorroborated) of October 7 rapes as justification for the ongoing atrocities.

As with practically all his music, Coleridge-Taylor's setting of *Song of Hiawatha* rendered the story of a coming genocide into a beautiful work of art. As an artist of much greater vintage but less talent than he, I try to do the same: examine challenging stories and our shared humanity, and draw links between yesterday and today, through the medium of art - not because I seek merely to entertain people or enrich myself, but to contribute to knowledge, healing, reparations, and above all, to hope.

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 8 years. 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. He is working on a screenplay telling the story of Nigerian, Pastor Daniels Ekarte (d. 1964), known as the African Saint of Liverpool.

Allyson Devenish, Piano. Ms. Devenish is originally from Ontario, Canada. She is a vocal coach with The National Opera Studio and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. Her performance schedule has taken her to Europe, the Americas, and throughout the United Kingdom (including Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Snape Maltings). She is musical director of Nitro VoX and Femmes Noires Feroces.

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR OF FREETOWN

Writer, performer: Tayo Aluko

Pianist: Allyson Devenish

Director: Mojisola Kareem.

Dramaturgs: Esther Wilson and Jennifer Farmer

Dance/Movement Dramaturg: Funmi Adewole

Set & Costume Designer: Phil Newman.

Sound Design: Liam McDermott.

Lighting Design: Aaron Molloy.

Arrangement of Rise Up, Mother Africa!: Deirdre Pascal

(Words and melody by Tayo Aluko)

Recorded Voices: Julius Obende, Dorcas Seb, Tayo Aluko

Poetry by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Song settings to poetry by:
Kathleen Easmon, Paul Laurence Dunbar,
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sarojini Naidoo, Christina Rosetti,
Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Tayo Aluko

Future Performances include:

June 6: Participant, 9th Annual Gary Mahoney Debate, Liverpool.

June 7: Participant, Charity Concert: A Wonderful Evening of
Music, Liverpool

Aug 5 – 25 (not Sundays). Coleridge-Taylor of Freetown.
C Aquila @ Edinburgh Fringe

August 28 Call Mr. Robeson @ North America Festival of Wales,
Pittsburgh, PA, USA

August 31. Call Mr. Robeson @ Atlanta Black Theatre Festival

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

Tayo Aluko & Friends

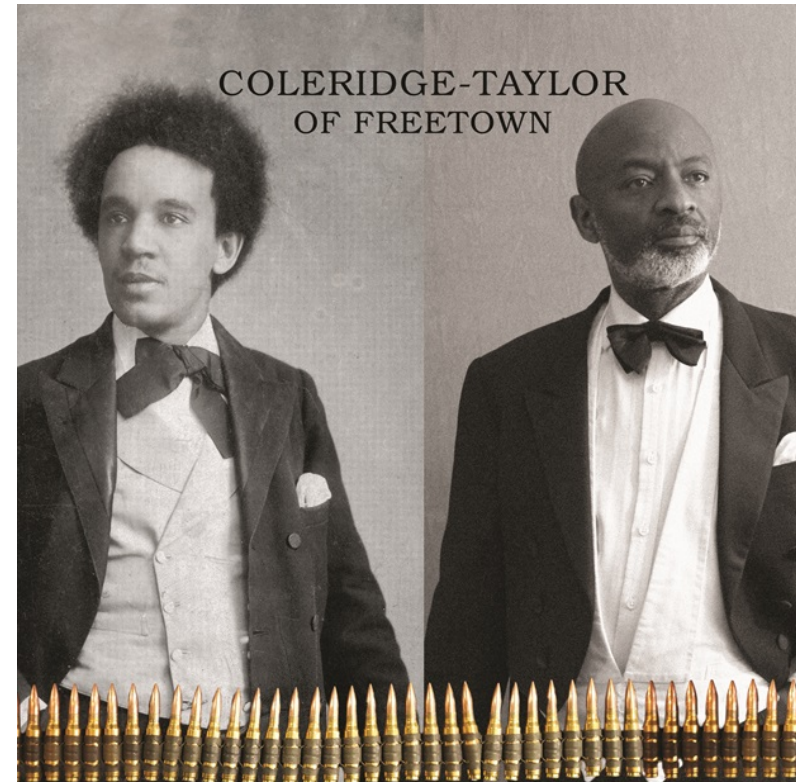
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**Tayo Aluko & Friends
and
Utopia Theatre present**



**Written and Performed by
Tayo Aluko**

With Allyson Devenish, Piano

**Rotunda Theatre @ Brighton Fringe
10 – 12 and 24 - 26 May, 2024 (World Premiere)**