

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS
GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING ENSEMBLE SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK
FRIDAY, APRIL 8 AT 8:00 P.M. IN ZELLERBACH HALL

SCHOOLTIME: Two 1-hour shows for students, Thursday, April 7 at 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

BERKELEY, March 2, 2005 – For over three decades, the women of **Sweet Honey in the Rock** have given voice to the African-American experience with an expansive interpretation of the close-harmony tradition that makes room for gospel, R&B, jazz, blues, folk, and rap as well as African and Caribbean stylings. The legendary vocal ensemble performs one night only **Friday, April 8 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall. One of the world's premier *a cappella* vocal ensembles, Sweet Honey in the Rock tackles topical issues like civil rights, the environment, domestic violence, materialism, feminism, motherhood, and apathy. "Rejoice indeed. For it is a reward on earth simply to hear Sweet Honey in the Rock," says the *Washington Post*. The vocal sextet (the seventh ensemble member is a sign language interpreter who accompanies each performance), possesses a distinct, uplifting sound that inspires and entertains audiences of all ages. Sweet Honey in the Rock includes founding member **Carol Maillard**, as well as **Ysaye M. Barnwell**, **Nitanju Bolade Casel**, **Aisha Kahlil**, two returning members **Arnaé** and **Louise Robinson**, and American Sign Language interpreter **Shirley Childress Saxton**. As part of the group's tradition, the ensemble will not sing from a set program but instead improvise from their vast repertoire.

In addition to the April 8th evening performance, Sweet Honey in the Rock will give two SchoolTime performances for Bay Area students, Thursday, April 7 at 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. in Zellerbach Hall.

Sweet Honey in the Rock is an ensemble with a truly remarkable history. Evolving out of a 1973 vocal-workshop run by founding member **Bernice Johnson Reagon**, the group has allowed all of its members—there have been 22 over the years—to continuously evolve as musicians, composers, arrangers, singers, and storytellers, all the while retaining Sweet Honey's trademark quality of sound. One thing has remained constant: the ensemble's commitment to the African-American musical traditions—both ancestral and modern—as a unifying, communal force against oppression of all types. "Sweet Honey in the Rock," Reagon writes, "is a woman born of a

struggling union of black women singers.” Last year was a year of transition; it marked the final year of touring and performing with founder Bernice Johnson Reagon.

Borned in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, **Carol Maillard** attended college in Washington, D.C. at the Catholic University of America where she studied violin and majored in drama. While in D.C., she began her professional acting career with the DC Black Repertory Company. A founding member of Sweet Honey in the Rock, she rejoined the group full time in 1992. Maillard is also a versatile and talented actress, writer, and producer. Her film credits include *Beloved* and *Thirty Years to Life*. A children's book based on her composition *Still the Same Me* is scheduled to be published by Simon and Schuster later this year.

Yasaye M. Barnwell is a native New Yorker now living in Washington, D.C., where she has, since 1979, performed with Sweet Honey in the Rock. She appears as a vocalist and/or instrumentalist on more than thirty recordings with Sweet Honey in the Rock as well as other artists. In addition to being a singer with a vocal range of over three octaves, Dr. Barnwell spends much of her time off-stage working as master teacher and choral clinician in cultural performance theory. In her first year with Sweet Honey, Dr. Barnwell provided leadership in developing the group's practice of making concerts accessible to the Deaf through Sign Language interpretation.

Nitanju Bolade Casel brought to Sweet Honey her unique performance experience in African vocal styles, jazz, improvisational rhythms, and hip hop after four years of study, performance and cultural organizing in Dakar, Senegal. Her extensive training, research, and teaching experience in African-derived traditions has its base in those pioneering communities in the late sixties which led the way to redefining and making accessible African expressive culture in the United States.

Joining Sweet Honey in the Rock in 1981, **Aisha Kahlil**, vocalist, composer, dancer/choreographer, and teacher, came as an extraordinary vocal experimental innovator with an impressive range to explore jazz, blues, African traditional and contemporary vocal styles and techniques. She received the CASA (Contemporary A Capella Society Association) "Best Soloist" award for her performances of *Fulani Chant* and *See See Rider* on the CD *In This Land* (Earthbeat! 1992).

A native of Chicago, Illinois, **Arnaé**'s life in music began at the age three with piano lessons and a spot in the family singing group, performing songs comprising the African-American religious traditions. While in college, Arnaé's musical awareness increased as she began to establish herself as an accomplished songwriter, bandleader and later, a public radio producer and announcer. This led to her five-year role as a producer and artistic director of the Smithsonian Institution's acclaimed jazz repertory series, commissioning artists to perform jazz master pieces at the National Museum of America History and gaining status as a cultural historian, organizer and performer. Arnaé performed with the group intermittingly since 1994 and was delighted to join the group full time this year.

Louise Robinson is a native New Yorker who began her relationship with music in the children's choir at church. Ms. Robinson has had the good fortune of expressing her creative talents in many arenas, including: studio voice-over work, background vocals, film, directing, and producing. For the past sixteen years, Ms. Robinson has been touring and performing with the vocal ensemble "Street Sounds", which she founded in 1989. After 26 years, Robinson returns to Sweet Honey. "It is a full circle and I am excited rejoin the women who have carried on and kept this vibrant woman alive!"

Shirley Childress Saxton is a veteran professional Sign Language interpreter, having learned American Sign Language from her deaf parents. In their honor, she founded the Herbert and Thomasina Childress Scholarship Fund to assist other Children of Deaf Adults (C.O.D.A.) to explore sign interpreting as a career option. Saxton began working as Sign Language interpreter for Sweet Honey in the Rock in 1980.

Over the past 26 years, Sweet Honey in the Rock has recorded 17 albums in addition to various projects, special appearances, and collaborations in film, book, and music. The group garnered a Grammy award in 1989 for work on the Smithsonian Folkways/Columbia recording, *Vision Shared: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly*. Sweet Honey begins its 31st year following a whirlwind, year-long 30th anniversary celebration that saw the release of the group's latest recording *The Women Gather*.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Sweet Honey in the Rock** on **Friday, April 8 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$24.00, \$34.00, and \$46.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket

Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu.

#

The *San Francisco Chronicle* is a season sponsor of Cal Performances; *San Francisco* magazine and Classical 102.1 KDFC are season media sponsors of the 2004/05 performing arts season.

Cal Performances' 2004/2005 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

#

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Thursday, April 7 at 10:30 a.m. & 1:00 p.m.
SCHOOLTIME PERFORMANCES

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Program:

Two one-hour performances for Bay Area schoolchildren by the Grammy Award-winning a capella ensemble.

Tickets: \$3.00 per student or adult chaperone, available in advance only through Cal Performances at (510) 642-1082. *SchoolTime* performances are open to students in grades 2 through 12 in Bay Area public and private schools. Supplemental study guides for the classroom are provided. For more information about the *SchoolTime* program, contact the *SchoolTime* coordinator at Cal Performances by email at eduprograms@calperfs.berkeley.edu, or by phone at (510) 642-0212.

#

Friday, April 8 at 8:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

World Stage

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Program: The six-member a cappella ensemble returns to Cal Performances for a not-to-be-missed performance celebrating African American tradition, culture, and music.

Tickets: \$24.00, \$34.00, and \$46.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door.

-30-