

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS



Sweet Honey in the Rock

Friday, April 8, 2005, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Arnaé, Ysaye Maria Barnwell, Nitanju Bolade Casel,
Aisha Kahlil, Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson, and Shirley Childress Saxton

Tonight's performance will be announced from the stage. There will be a 20-minute intermission.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sweet Honey in the Rock was founded by Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1973 at the D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company, and ever since then the internationally acclaimed a cappella group has been a vital and innovative presence in the music culture of Washington, DC, and in communities of conscience around the world. Now entering its fourth decade, the Grammy Award-winning ensemble continues its legacy, following Reagon's retirement in February 2004. Sweet Honey is now a sextet, welcoming to the group two singers, Louise Robinson and Arnaé, both of whom had been part of the Sweet Honey family in the past. The title for the group comes from Psalm 81:16, which promises feeding a people from honey out of the rock. Because honey is sweet and nurturing, and rock represents elemental strength, the metaphor of *sweet honey in the rock* captures completely these African American women. Their repertoire is steeped in the sacred music of the Black church, the clarion calls of the civil rights movement and songs of the struggle for justice everywhere.

Sweet Honey In The Rock possesses a stunning vocal prowess that captures the complex sounds of blues, spirituals, traditional gospel hymns, rap, reggae, African chants, hip-hop, ancient lullabies and jazz improvisation. Sweet Honey's collective voice, occasionally accompanied by hand percussion instruments, is filled with soulful harmonies and intricate rhythms.

In the best and in the hardest of times, Sweet Honey In The Rock has come in song to communities across the US, and around the world, raising its voice in hope, love, justice, peace and resistance. Sweet Honey invites audiences to open their minds and hearts and think about who we are and what we do to one another and to our fellow creatures on this planet.

Sweet Honey begins its 31st year following a whirlwind, year-long 30th anniversary celebration that saw the release of the group's 17th recording, *The Women Gather*, and the release of a limited edition live recording, *Endings and Beginnings*, a concert featuring the Sweet Honey In The Rock Community Chorus. The group also made contributions to three new anthologies: *Creole Bred: A Tribute to Creole and Zydeco*; *Shout Sister Shout: A Tribute to Sister Rosetta Tharpe*; and *cELLABRATION! – A Tribute to Ella Jenkins*. In May 2004, Sweet Honey In The Rock received the prestigious Ford Honors Award from the

University Musical Society of the University of Michigan.

Sweet Honey's 31st season promises to be as full as the last, and on the horizon is the much anticipated PBS airing of *A Song For Everyone*, Emmy award-winning filmmaker Stanley Nelson's documentary on the group.

Arnaé is an innovative singer-songwriter who possesses a voice of stunning range and color. She is also an accomplished cultural historian and organizer who has served as a public radio programmer and producer and artistic director of an acclaimed jazz repertory series at the Smithsonian Institution.

As a performing artist, Arnaé has toured and recorded throughout North and South America, Europe, Japan, Australia and the Middle East. Her genre-spanning artistry includes performances with artists including India Arie, Geri Allen, Henry Threadgill, Arrested Development, B.B. King, Nona Hendryx, the Black Rock Coalition Orchestra, Sekou Sundiata, Kelis and Urban Bush Women. Television and film soundscore credits include *Eyes On The Prize*, *Frederick Douglas: When The Lion Wrote History*, MTV's *Battlegrounds: Ball or Fall*, and arrangements for *Maid In Manhattan* (Sony Records). Arnaé has also conducted vocal workshops as resident artist at numerous institutions including der Technischen Universität in Graz, Austria. Her formidable arranging skills led to long-term stints as principal vocal arranger and opening performer for Wyclef Jean's *Ecleptic* tour and U2's *Elevation* tour.

Arnaé comes to Sweet Honey In The Rock as a former member of In Process..., the group's a cappella workshop. She was thrilled to finally perform with Sweet Honey In The Rock in a tour which resulted in the CD, *Alive in Australia: Sweet Honey In The Rock*.

A native of Chicago, Arnaé currently resides in New York City where she is well known as a first-call session singer and a recording industry/special events contractor. She is also co-owner and operator of Allustrious Recording Studios.

Dr. Ysaye M. Barnwell is a native New Yorker now living in Washington, DC, where, since 1979, she has performed with Sweet Honey In The Rock. She appears as a vocalist and/or instrumentalist on more than twenty-five recordings with Sweet Honey and other artists. She spends much of her time off-

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stage as a master teacher and clinician in cultural performance theory and voice production. Her workshop, “*Building a Vocal Community: Singing In The African American Tradition*,” has been conducted all over the United States, Great Britain and Australia.

While her 15-year study of the violin, beginning at age 2, was the foundation of her musical career, Dr. Barnwell holds bachelor and master of science degrees in speech pathology, a Ph.D. in cranio-facial studies, and a master of science in public health. For 12 years she was a professor at the College of Dentistry at Howard University, and in addition administered and implemented community health projects.

She is a commissioned composer and arranger who has worked on numerous and varied dance, choral, film, video, theater and recording projects. In addition, she is an actress whose credits include voice-over narrations and appearances on television, film and video. She has written a children's book, *No Mirrors In My Nana's House*; compiled and edited *Continuum: The First Songbook of Sweet Honey In The Rock*; produced the 25th anniversary CD of Sweet Honey In The Rock; and is the featured storyteller/singer on her release *UM HMM*, a feast of African American stories, poems and songs for young audiences.

Nitanju Bolade Casel first came to Sweet Honey after four years of studying, performing and cultural organization in Dakar, Senegal, where she was co-founder with Marie Guinier of ADEA (Artistes des Echanges Africaines). Dedicated to the exchange of ideas and services between Africans of the diaspora, ADEA worked in alliance with local artists, the National Council of Negro Women, the National Theatre Daniel Sorano, the University of Dakar, Air Afrique radio (O.R.T.S.) and television programming, the Schomberg Center for Research and Development, and the late Dr. Ewart Guinier of Harvard University. She has brought the improvisational rhythms of hip-hop and jazz to Sweet Honey In The Rock's palette since her arrival in 1985. She is currently co-director, with her sister Aisha Kahlil, of First World Productions, a cultural and educational organization in the performance arts. Nitanju made her film debut appearance in *Beloved*.

Aisha Kahlil joined the group in 1981. As an experienced jazz vocalist and African dance and

song artist, she has moved Sweet Honey In The Rock into new territory of improvisation. She is Sweet Honey In The Rock's strongest blues singer. In 1994, CASA (Contemporary A Cappella Society of America) named Aisha as best soloist in a cappella music for her performance of *See See Rider* and *Fulani Chant*. Some of the group's most innovative and experimental work occurs in the performance of her compositions, including *Fulani Chant* and *Wodaabe Nights*. *Wodaabe Nights* was included in the sound score for the 1998 PBS film series, *Africans in America*, produced by WGBH-TV. Her composition *Fulani Chant* was included in *Climb Against the Odds*, a benefit recording for Breast Cancer Funds, and the film score for *Down in the Delta*, directed by Maya Angelou. She debuted as an actress on film in *Beloved*. Aisha composed the closing song for the American Bible Society video featuring Sweet Honey in the Rock. She also composed and performed original music for the film *Freedom Song*, starring Danny Glover and directed by Phil Robinson with music by Sweet Honey in the Rock and James Horner, and appeared with Sweet Honey In The Rock as guest artist on the TNT special *A Tribute to Joni Mitchell*. She is currently at work on a recording project featuring her original compositions and arrangements.

Carol Maillard was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and attended Catholic University of America in Washington DC, where she studied violin and theatre. She began her performance career at the DC Black Repertory Theatre as a member of the professional company. Carol has worked extensively both on and off Broadway, in many national and international tours, on TV and in film. She has produced, written and recorded with Sweet Honey In The Rock and other well known artists. Her arrangement of “Motherless Child” is featured in the film *The Visit* and the documentary film on Dorothy Height, *We Are Not Vanishing*. She is a published writer and lives in New York City with her son, Jordan. She is a founding member of Sweet Honey In The Rock.

Louise Robinson is a native New Yorker who began her relationship with music in the children's choir at church. She went on to play the accordion and concert bass, later joining the all-city orchestra and the citywide chorus. She studied music while attending the High School of Music and Art in New

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York City. She graduated from Howard University in Washington, DC, with a bachelor's of fine arts. Louise's first professional job was with the Arena Stage's company, Living Stage. She then moved on to join Robert Hook's newly formed acting ensemble at the DC Black Repertory Company. It was there that Louise, along with Mie, Carol Maillard and Bernice Reagon, formed the a cappella quartet, Sweet Honey In The Rock. Louise moved back to New York several years later to resume her acting career and performed both on and off Broadway in such productions as *Reggae*, *Tintypes*, *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Shirley Childress Saxton is a veteran professional Sign Language interpreter having learned American Sign Language from her deaf parents. She has twenty-five years of experience providing Sign interpreting services in a wide range of life

situations including education, employment, legal, medical and performing arts/music. Shirley conducts master workshops on Sign interpreting music. She holds a bachelor's degree in deaf education and is a certified member of the Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf, Inc., which published a tribute to her entitled, "Shirley Childress Johnson, The Mother of Songs Sung in ASL." She has been recognized for her interpreting work and services to the community by awards from deaf advocacy organizations including Women Unlimited, Deafpride, Inc. and the Silent Mission at Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, DC. She has written on her experiences as a child of deaf adults and her work as a sign language interpreter can be found in *We Who Believe In Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock...Still On The Journey*; *Continuum: The First Song Book of Sweet Honey In The Rock*; and *Souls of My Sister: Black Women Break Their Silence, Tell Their Stories, and Heal Their Spirit*. Her two sons Reginald and Deon both sign.

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