

Friday, February 24, 2006, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Sweet Honey In The Rock



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(l to r) Louise Robinson, Aisha Kablil, Arnaé, Shirley Childress Saxton, Carol Maillard, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Dr. Ysaye Maria Barnwell

I have always believed art is the conscience of the human soul and that artists have the responsibility not only to show life as it is but to show life as it should be. . . . *Sweet Honey In The Rock* has withstood the onslaught. She has been unprovoked by the 30 pieces of silver. Her songs lead us to the well of truth that nourishes the will and courage to stand strong. She is the keeper of the flame.—Harry Belafonte

Founded by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1973 at the D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company, **Sweet Honey In The Rock**, internationally renowned a *cappella* ensemble, has been a vital and innovative presence in the music culture of Washington, D.C., and in communities of conscience around the world. Now entering her fourth decade, the Grammy Award-winning ensemble moves forward, following Dr. Reagon's retirement in February 2004, continuing the legacy begun 33 years ago. Sweet Honey is now a septet, welcoming back two singers, Louise Robinson and Arnaé, both of whom had been part of the Sweet Honey family in the past.

From Psalm 81:16 comes the promise to a people of being fed by honey out of the rock. Honey—an ancient substance, sweet and nurturing. Rock—an elemental strength, enduring

the winds of time. The metaphor of sweet honey in the rock captures completely these African American women, whose 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.

Rooted in a deeply held commitment to create music out of the rich textures of African American legacy and traditions, 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, produces a sound 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 United States and around the world, raising her voice in hope, love, justice, peace and resistance. Sweet Honey invites her 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 celebrated her 32nd year with the CD release, *Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your*

Voice!, the live soundtrack recording of the Stanley Nelson film which aired on PBS's *American Masters* during the summer of 2005. The film received voluminous praise from critics and audiences everywhere, and it is now available on DVD.



The women who comprise Sweet Honey are more than entertainers. They are a septet of artists dedicated to preserving and celebrating African American culture and singing traditions. They are poets and activists who cannot remain silent on the most pressing contemporary issues. And it is the activist's fervor and sense of urgency that fuels their sometimes tender and often explosive musical drive. Sweet Honey members continuously evolve as musicians, composers, arrangers, singers and storytellers, retaining an unmistakable quality of sound, yet always sounding fresh.

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 traveled the globe, touring and recording throughout North and South America, Europe, Japan, Australia and the Middle East. Her genre-spanning artistry includes performances with artists such as 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. Her television

and film soundtrack credits include *Eyes on the Prize*, *Frederick Douglass: When The Lion Wrote History*, MTV's *Battlegrounds: Ball or Fall* and arrangements for *Maid in Manhattan*. Arnaé has also conducted vocal workshops as resident artist at numerous institutions, including der Technischen Universität in Graz, Austria. Her formidable arranging skills have led to long-term stints as principle vocal arranger and opening performer for Wyclef Jean's *Ecleftric* 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, D.C., where, since 1979, she has performed with Sweet Honey In The Rock. She appears as a vocalist and/or instrumentalist on more than 25 recordings with Sweet Honey and other artists. Dr. Barnwell spends much of her time offstage 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, making her work in the field a real source of inspiration for her performances onstage.

Dr. Barnwell's 15-year study of the violin beginning at age two was the foundation of her musical career. She holds BS and MS degrees in Speech Pathology, a PhD in Cranio-Facial Studies and a Master of Public Health. For 12 years, she was a professor at the College of Dentistry at Howard University, during which time she also administered and implemented community health projects.

Dr. Barnwell is a commissioned composer and arranger who has worked on numerous and varied dance, choral, film, video, theater and recording projects. In addition to these endeavors, Dr. Barnwell is an actress whose credits include voice-over narrations and appearances on both television and big-screen film and video. She has authored a children's book, *No Mirrors in My Nana's House*, illustrated by Synthia Saint James; compiled and edited *Continuum: The First Songbook of Sweet Honey In The Rock*; produced Sweet Honey In The Rock's 25th anniversary CD, *...twenty-five...*; 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 African 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 Schomburg Center for Research and Development and the late Dr. Ewart Guinier of Harvard University. Casel 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. Casel made her film debut appearance in *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme.

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, the Contemporary A Cappella Society of America (CASA) named Kahlil 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. "Fulani Chant" was included in the *Climb Against the Odds* benefit recording for Breast Cancer Funds and in the film score for *Down in the Delta*, directed by Maya Angelou. Recently added to her acting credits is her debut appearance in *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme. 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 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 D.C., where she studied violin and theater. She began her performance career at the D.C. Black Repertory Theater 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 in the documentary film about 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. SGMKJ!

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 York. She graduated with a BFA from Howard University in Washington, D.C.

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 D.C. 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 25 years of experience providing Sign interpreting services in a wide range of life situations, including educational, 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., who published a tribute to her in an article 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, D.C. She has authored three writings on her experiences as a child of Deaf adults (C.O.D.A.) and her work as a sign language interpreter that can be found in the following publications: *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*.