

Thursday, April 22, 2010, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Sweet Honey In The Rock



Piero Esis

(clockwise from top left) Aisha Kahlil, Carol Maillard, Shirley Childress Saxton, Ysaye Maria Barnwell, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Louise Robinson

This evening's program will be announced from the stage.

Cal Performances' 2009–2010 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

FOUNDED BY BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON in 1973 at the D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company, **Sweet Honey In The Rock**, the internationally renowned *a cappella* ensemble, has been a vital and innovative presence in the music culture of Washington DC and in communities of conscience around the world.

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 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 how we treat each other, our fellow creatures who share this planet and, of course, the planet itself.

Following their 2008 Grammy-nominated release, *Experience...101*, Sweet Honey returned to the studio to record *Go in Grace*, original music composed for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Together, these two artistic treasures of the African-American experience performed this once-in-a-lifetime collaboration throughout the United States during the 2008–2009 season.

Equally thrilling was the invitation received from First Lady Michelle Obama in February 2009 to perform at the White House in celebration of African-American History Month. As the

Associated Press reported, “foot-stomping music filled the East Room” as Sweet Honey sang for sixth- and seventh-graders from around the city.

Sweet Honey In The Rock is Aisha Kahlil, Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Shirley Childress Saxton and Ysaye Maria Barnwell.

Aisha Kahlil possesses a dynamic, innate power and range in jazz, blues, traditional, contemporary and African vocal styles and techniques.

Ms. Kahlil's interest in music was evident at an early age. She was a member of local choirs in her native Buffalo, New York, and performed as a vocalist with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in several productions, including *Porgy and Bess*, *Carmen Jones* and *The Messiah*. She also sang the role of Monica in a WGBH production of Menotti's *The Medium*, and performed at Carnegie Hall in Julius Eastman's *The Thruway*. She worked with the Studio Arena Theatre, where she was awarded a full scholarship, and at the Buffalo Black Drama Workshop, where she toured in the production *Willus Way Is Not a Violent Man*, directed by Ed Smith. During this time she became interested in the music of such jazz artists as John Coltrane, Leon Thomas, Betty Carter and Pharoah Sanders.

Ms. Kahlil majored in theater at Northeastern University in Boston. She also studied voice and music theory at the New England Conservatory of Music, and performed with *Ebony Jua*, a local jazz ensemble that toured the East Coast. While at Northeastern, Ms. Kahlil directed *M(ego) and the Green Ball of Freedom*, *Where we at?*, a play by *Martie Charles*, and performed and directed *Sister Sonji*, by Sonia Sanchez.

A master teacher in voice and dance, Ms. Kahlil has taught at the Institute for Contemporary Dance, The Joy of Motion, the Boston Center for the Arts, Leslie College, the Dance Place, and the D.C. Black Repertory Theatre, as well as teaching and lecturing at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and at Maharishi International University.

Ms. Kahlil's artistic pursuits have taken her to New York City, where she studied extensively at the Alvin Ailey School, and with Frank Hatchett, Pepsi Bethel, Fred Benjamin, and Emiko and Yasuko Tokunaga. She also appeared in Joseph Papp's off-

Broadway production of *The Haggadah*, co-composed and performed in the musical *Two Thousand Seasons*, and danced with Titos Sampas's Tanawa. She also performed with Talib Kibwe, Abdullah Ibrahim, and Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra.

In Washington DC, she has worked with Brother Ah and the Sounds of Awareness and has been a featured artist in the Smithsonian Institution's *Jazz in the Palm Court*, where she presented the music of blues pioneer Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Ms. Kahlil danced with the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers and with Kankouran. She also directed and choreographed for the First World Dance Theatre and co-directed and performed for First World Productions, where she also co-wrote, with Nitanju Bolade Casel, the original production *Bright Moments in Great Black Music*. Her arrangement of "Strange Fruit" was featured in *Freedom Never Dies*, a PBS production of the life of Harry Moore.

Ms. Kahlil was voted Best Soloist by the Contemporary A Cappella Society for her work on her composition "Fulani Chant" and for her rendition of "See See Rider." Her composition "Wodaabe Nights" was featured in the film *Africans in America*, and "Fulani Chant" was included in the film *Down in the Delta*, directed by Maya Angelou. Her work can also be heard in *Climb Against the Odds*, a film produced by the Breast Cancer Fund. Ms. Kahlil's film credits include *Beloved*, starring Oprah Winfrey. With Sweet Honey and James Horner, she wrote and recorded original music for the film *Freedom Song*, starring Danny Glover.

Carol Maillard was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although she originally attended Catholic University of America on scholarship as a violin performance major, she soon began writing music and performing with the Drama Department and eventually changed her major to theater.

This passion for the stage brought her to the D.C. Black Repertory Company and the beginnings of the vocal ensemble that was to become Sweet Honey In The Rock. Ms. Maillard is an accomplished actress and has performed in film, television and on stage. Her theater credits encompass a wide range of styles from musical comedy

and revues to drama and experimental. She has performed on and off Broadway (*Eubie, Don't Get God Started, Comin' Uptown, Home, It's So Nice to Be Civilized, Beehive, Forever My Darling*), with the Negro Ensemble Company (*Home, Zooman and the Sign, Colored Peoples Time, The Great Mac Daddy*) and the New York Shakespeare Festival (*Spunk, Caucasian Chalk Circle, Under Fire, A Photograph...*), and at the Actors Studio (*Hunter*). She can be seen in the feature films *Beloved* and *Thirty Years to Life*. On television, Ms. Maillard has appeared in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* and *Halleluiah!* (PBS); *Law and Order: SVU* and *Law and Order*.

Ms. Maillard is a founding member of Sweet Honey In The Rock. Her powerful rendition of "Motherless Child," arranged for Sweet Honey, is featured in the motion picture *The Visit* and in the Dorothy Height documentary, *We Are Not Vanishing*. Ms. Maillard was Conceptual Producer for the 2005 documentary film *Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice!* on PBS's *American Masters*. Produced and directed by Stanley Nelson of Firelightmedia Films, the film chronicled Sweet Honey's 30th anniversary year (2003).

As a vocalist, she has record with Horace Silver, Betty Buckley, and on the SYDA Foundation's inspirational recording, *Sounds of Light*.

In 2003, her poem *H₂O Flow* was featured as the opening selection of Marjorie Reyerson's photo/poetry book, *Water Music*. In 1998, she penned the "Herstory" for Sweet Honey's first songbook, *Continuum*.

Ms. Maillard lives in Manhattan and is the mother of Jordan Maillard Ware, currently attending Morehouse College in Atlanta. SGMKJ!

Louise Robinson, a native New Yorker, studied double bass for six years and attended the High School of Music and Art.

A graduate of Howard University with a BFA, Ms. Robinson's professional career began at Washington DC's Arena Stage. She accepted Robert Hooks's invitation to become a member of the new D.C. Black Repertory Company Acting Ensemble. It was out of this theater company that Ms. Robinson, along with Carol Maillard, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Mie, formed Sweet Honey.

Ms. Robinson's career has taken her up many paths, including performances both on and off-Broadway and in film and studio recording. She has also worn the producer's hat as she, along with Ms. Maillard and Smokey Ronald Stevens, produced *A Sho Nuff Variety Revue*, a series of performances showcasing some of New York's finest talent, including Adolph Caesar, Sandra Reeves Phillips and legendary tap dancers Gregory Hines, Avon Long and Joe Attles.

Ms. Robinson was the founding director of the Bay Area a cappella quintet Street Sounds, taking their music around the country and the world for 14 years. Ms. Robinson returned to Sweet Honey In The Rock in 2004, and combines her experience in theater and music to offer workshops that explore the creative freedom in us all.

Nitanju Bolade Casel became a member of Sweet Honey In The Rock in 1985, after four years of studying, performing and cultural organizing in Dakar, Senegal. As a co-founder, with Marie Guinier, of Artistes des Echanges Africaines, she worked in alliance with local artists, the National Council of Negro Women, the National Theatre Daniel Sorano, the University of Dakar, Air Afrique, Television and Radio Orts, the Schomberg Center for Research and Development, and the late Dr. Ewart Guinier of Harvard University. Ms. Casel is also the former assistant director of the Art of Black Dance & Music and director of Young Afrique Dance Company, both in Massachusetts.

Ms. Casel now works with her sister, Aisha Kahlil, as co-director of First World Productions, and heads her own publishing company, Clear Ice Music. Her compositions can be heard in the Australian Broadcasting Company's 2006 educational series, *Sing!*, Mystic Seaport's multimedia history presentation *Black Hands, Blue Seas: The African American Maritime Experience* and Tribeca Production company's *The Box*. Ms. Casel was a finalist in both the 2006 and 2007 International Songwriter's Competitions, and a Grammy nominee for Sweet Honey's *Experience...101*, which she produced.

Ms. Casel lives on the east coast with her husband, Oso Tayari and their teenage son, Obadele.

A native of Washington DC, **Shirley Childress Saxton** is a skilled professional Sign language interpreter who learned American Sign Language (ASL) from her Deaf parents. In their honor, she founded the Herbert and Thomasina Childress Scholarship Fund to assist other children of Deaf adults (CODA) to explore Sign interpreting as a work option.

Ms. Saxton's career has included providing interpreting services for students in high school and college classrooms, for employees in staff meetings, job training and professional conferences, in legal settings and in religious services. In health care, Ms. Saxton interpreted for the Mental Health Program for the Deaf at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and with Project Access of Deafpride, Inc., which sponsored her first international assignment to Nairobi, Kenya, as interpreter for a Deaf delegate to a United Nations conference.

Ms. Saxton's extensive performing arts interpreting include an off-Broadway production of *Lost in the Stars*, and with such artists as Bernice Johnson Reagon, Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir, Toshi Reagon and Big Lovely, Holly Near, Pete Seeger and In Process. Ms. Saxton has also interpreted for Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Audrey Lorde.

Ms. Saxton was first to recognize the need for more African-American interpreters, and she founded the organization BRIDGES to focus attention on Black Deaf consumers and interpreters. Ms. Saxton was also a founding member of the organization Black Deaf Advocates. The *Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf* published a tribute to her, entitled "Shirley Childress Johnson, the Mother of Songs Sung in ASL." She has been recognized for her interpreting service to the community with awards from Deaf advocacy organizations the Silent Mission Circle at Shiloh Baptist Church, Deafpride, Inc., Women Unlimited and National R.I.D. Interpreters of Color.

Ms. Saxton holds a bachelor's degree in Deaf education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She has authored several articles on her experiences as a CODA and her work as a Sign language interpreter. Her family, sons Reginald and Deon and sisters Maxine and Khaula, all Sign.

Ysaye Maria Barnwell was born in New York City and has lived in Washington DC for over 40 years. Her life experiences have taken her down three major paths. She began in music at age 2½, studying violin for 15 years with her father and majoring in music in high school. She sang in a choir while in junior high school and in college. In 1976, she founded the Jubilee Singers at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington DC. It was there, in 1979, that Bernice Johnson Reagon witnessed her as a singer and a Sign Language interpreter and invited her to audition for Sweet Honey In The Rock.

Dr. Barnwell is also a speech pathologist with bachelor's, master's (SUNY Geneseo, 1963–1968) and doctoral (University of Pittsburg, 1975) degrees, and was a professor in the College of Dentistry for more than a decade. In 1981, she completed post-doctoral work and earned a Master of Science in Public Health.

Over the past two decades, Dr. Barnwell has earned a significant reputation as a commissioned composer and arranger, author, master teacher and

choral clinician in African-American cultural performance. She has authored two children's books, *No Mirrors in My Nana's House* and *We Are One*, both published by Harcourt, Inc.; a boxed set of African-American stories and songs for young people, *Um Hmm*; and an instructional boxed set, *Singing in the African American Tradition*. She created the Community Sing, which she conducts monthly in Washington DC, and the workshop *Building a Vocal Community: Singing in the African American Tradition*, which she has conducted on three continents, utilizing an African worldview and African-American history, values, and cultural and vocal traditions to work with and build community among singers and nonsingers alike. Her pedagogy is highly respected among musicians, educators, health workers, activists, organizers and in the corporate and non-profit sectors. Dr. Barnwell is also an aspiring actress whose most recent endeavors include the narration for the NPR documentary, *W. C. Handy's Blues*.