

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE GLORIOUS AND POWERFUL SOUNDS OF
SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5 AT 8:00 P.M. IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

**Toshi Reagon and her band Big Lovely join the six-member a cappella ensemble for
Eveningsong, a lively collaboration celebrating Sweet Honey's 30th anniversary**

**SCHOOLTIME: Two 1-hour shows for students, Thursday, December 4 at
10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.**

BERKELEY, October 29, 2003 – For 30 years, 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 with **Toshi Reagon** (daughter of Sweet Honey's founding member **Bernice Johnson Reagon**) and the musicians of **Big Lovely** one night only **Friday, December 5 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall. The unique and spirited program, entitled ***Eveningsong***, is created in honor of Sweet Honey's 30th anniversary, and is scheduled to appear in a limited number of venues on the 2003-04 tour, beginning with New York's Carnegie Hall on November 1. In addition to the December 5th evening performance, Sweet Honey in the Rock will give two *SchoolTime* performances for Bay Area students, **Thursday, December 4 at 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall.

Since 1973, Sweet Honey in the Rock has been one of the world's premier a cappella vocal ensembles, tackling topical issues like civil rights, the environment, domestic violence, materialism, feminism, motherhood, and apathy through song. The award-winning and critically acclaimed vocal quintet (the sixth ensemble member is a professional sign language interpreter who accompanies each performance), possesses a distinct, uplifting sound that inspires and entertains audiences of all ages. Current Sweet Honey members include founding members **Bernice Johnson Reagon** and **Carol Maillard**, as well as **Ysaye M. Barnwell**, **Nitanju Bolade Casel**, **Aisha Kahlil**, and American Sign Language interpreter **Shirly Childress Saxton**. Members of Big Lovely include **Toshi Reagon**

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(guitar, vocals), **Judith Casselberry** (guitar, vocals), **Jen Leigh** (guitar), **Fred Cash** (bass), and **Chicken Burke** (percussion).

EVENINGSONG

With *Eveningsong*, the members of Sweet Honey in the Rock, in collaboration with Toshi Reagon and Big Lovely, set out to assemble an evening of songs that represented a narrative journey of the real life experiences shared between the mother-daughter artists. “Toshi Reagon was nine years old when I began to work on forming what has become Sweet Honey in the Rock,” Bernice Johnson Reagon writes. “For three decades we all grew and developed in supportive roles in relationship to each other, and never was the support only in one direction.” In the spring of 2002, all the women came together in a workshop setting to talk about the songs that already documented the Sweet Honey-Toshi Reagon relationship: the Sweet Honey songs that were performed and recorded by Toshi Reagon, and the Toshi Reagon songs that were a part of Sweet Honey’s repertoire. The list was formidable. But the group gave structure to a program after sharing ideas and principles for nine months, and then enlisted the help of long-time sound engineer **Art Steele** to give balance and coherence to a program that would have to maintain the integrity of both a capella and multi-instrumental sensibilities. *Eveningsong* premiered in January 2003 at the University of Michigan, and will be performed in just a handful of cities during the 30th anniversary year.

30th ANNIVERSARY OF SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

Evolving out of a vocal workshop run by founding member **Bernice Johnson Reagon** at the now-defunct Washington, D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company, Reagon started the workshop by teaching its participants “Sweet Honey in the Rock”, an old quartet-style spiritual about a land so fertile that when one cracked the stones, honey would flow from them. When the workshop chorus first swelled with the fusion of power, grace, passion and purpose that has since become the ensemble’s trademark, it seemed right to assume the title as a name.

Now 30 years old, **Sweet Honey in the Rock** is an ensemble with a truly remarkable history. 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 that always sounds fresh. One thing has remained constant since Reagon first formed the group in 1973: 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 woman singers.” Sweet Honey’s 30th year is also a year of transition; it marks the final year of touring and performing with founder Bernice Johnson Reagon as a member of the ensemble.

Beginning with the self-titled 1976 debut album, *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, the ensemble has released close to 20 albums, the most recent entitled *The Women Gather* on Earthbeat! Records. The CD is produced by Toshi Reagon, who has in the past assisted her mother on the production of Sweet Honey recordings. But this time it was the elder Reagon who was the assistant producer, and she writes of the work of her daughter and constant collaborator: “When [Toshi] took on the *The Women Gather* project, she sent us five songs she had written ... I could feel our flavor, but there is no one in Sweet Honey who could have written those songs. For me, it is truly a blessing to be moving forward in my life and work and finding so much in the younger generation that is so strong and resonant.”

The 30th anniversary year will also be the subject of a new film produced and directed by Stanley Nelson, a recent recipient of a Macarthur Fellowship Award. Producer and director of the recent documentary *Emmett Till*, Nelson’s Sweet Honey in the Rock film project will follow the ensemble through the year and air in 2004.

Bernice Johnson Reagon, singer, composer, scholar, and activist, organized Sweet Honey in the Rock in 1973. She is a Distinguished Professor of History at American University in Washington D.C., and Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. Reagon is the author of *If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me* (Nebraska Press, 2001), editor and author of *We’ll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (Smithsonian Press, 1992) and, in collaboration with fellow members of Sweet Honey, author of *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock...Still on the Journey* (Anchor Books, 1993). Reagon was featured in the 1992 Emmy-nominated PBS documentary *The Songs Are Free: Bernice Johnson Reagon with Bill Moyers*. She has served as music consultant, producer, composer, and performer on several film projects including the Emmy award-winning *We Shall Overcome* (Ginger Productions), *Roots of Resistance* (Roja Productions), *Eyes on the Prize* (Blackside Productions), and the Peabody award-winning *Africans in America* (WGBH-TV series for PBS), and was composer/producer of James Horner’s film score for *Freedom Song* (TNT).

A seasoned live performer, **Toshi Reagon** jumped into the spotlight when rock musician Lenny Kravitz tapped her to open for him on his first world tour. She has since shared the stage with the diverse company of those such as Chaka Kahn, Vernon Reid, Elvis Costello, Nona Hendryx, Pete Seeger and Lisa Loeb. Whether playing solo or with her band **Big Lovely**, her fusion of rock, soul, R&B, and blues-tinged folk draws listeners in, and has earned her many rave reviews in the years she has been performing. “Her live shows shower retro-funk, urban blues, and folk on the audience with evangelical fervor,” wrote *The New Yorker* in 2002. “To hear her is to believe.” Recordings include the 1994 self-released *The Rejected Stone*; 1997’s *Kindness* (Smithsonian Folkways); and the acclaimed 1999 release *The Righteous Ones* (Razor & Tie). Reagon’s most recent CD is simply called *Toshi*, and features the production flair of Craig Street (known for his work with Cassandra Wilson, Norah Jones, and Holly Cole, among many others). Highlights of the album are the gentle blues melody *Slippin’ Away*, and a languid, soulful reading of The Cars’ *Just What I Needed*, featuring Marc Anthony Thompson, a.k.a. Chocolate Genius. Reagon cites her musical abilities and political consciousness as springing from her family, particularly her mother, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and her 7-year-old daughter, who she says “loves every song on the record and can sing them all, so it makes me think much more about what kind of messages I am conveying and what I am saying in my songs.” The 30th anniversary tour of Sweet Honey marks the first time Toshi Reagon has toured extensively with the ensemble.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Sweet Honey in the Rock’s *Eveningsong*** program on **Friday, December 5 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$22.00, \$30.00 and \$42.00**. 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).

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Thursday, December 4 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.

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Friday, December 5 at 8:00 p.m.

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

World Stage

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Eveningsong

Program:

The six-member a cappella ensemble is joined by Toshi Reagon and her band Big Lovely for *Eveningsong*, a not-to-be-missed collaboration celebrating Sweet Honey's 30th anniversary.

Tickets: \$22.00, \$30.00, and \$42.00, 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.

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