

Sunday, May 6, 2012, 7pm
Zellerbach Hall

Sweet Honey In The Rock



Dwight Carter

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

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage.

Cal Performances' 2011-2012 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

"I have always believed that 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 BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON in 1973 (with Mie, Carol Maillard and Louise Robinson) 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, D.C., 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 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 how we treat

each other, our fellow creatures who share this planet, and the planet itself.

Sweet Honey's 20th CD release, *Experience...101*, was a 2008 Grammy Award nominee. The excitement continued as Sweet Honey was asked to compose new material in celebration of Alvin Ailey Dance Theater's 50th anniversary. Together, these two artistic treasures of the African American experience performed this once-in-a-lifetime collaboration throughout the United States. The music for the collaboration was released on a CD entitled *Go in Grace*.

On February 18, 2009, Sweet Honey gave a concert at the White House at the invitation of President and Mrs. Barack Obama.

The following year saw the release of a CD and video in response to Arizona Law SB-1070, and the creation of a tribute concert, "Remembering Nina, Odetta and Miriam Makeba."

The 2011-2012 season finds Sweet Honey celebrating her 38th birthday, and what a year it will be! D.C. residents were treated to a performance of the tribute concert on October 22, 2011, and in April 2012 a new work, *Affirmations*, premiered in performance with the National Symphony.

Sweet Honey In The Rock are Ysaye Maria Barnwell, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Aisha Kahlil, Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson and Shirley Childress Saxton (Sign Language Interpreter).



Ysaye Maria Barnwell was born in New York City and has lived in Washington, D.C., for over 40 years. Her life experiences have taken her down three major paths. She began in music at the age of 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 then in college. In 1976, she founded the Jubilee Singers at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. 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 the bachelor's, master's (SUNY Geneseo, 1963–1968) and Ph.D. (University of Pittsburgh, 1975) degrees, and was a professor in the College of Dentistry for over 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 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, D.C., and the workshop *Building a Vocal Community*: *Singing in the African American Tradition*, which she has conducted on three continents, utilizing an African world view, and African American history, values, 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 corporate and nonprofit sectors. Dr. Barnwell is also an aspiring actress whose most recent endeavors include the narration for the NPR documentary *W. C. Handy's Blues*.



in alliance with local artists, the National

Council of Negro Women, the National Theater 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 2006 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 Competition, 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.



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 *Messiah*. She also sang the role of Monica in a special WGBH production of Menotti's *The Medium*, and performed at Carnegie Hall in Julius Eastman's avant-garde composition *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, Yma Sumac and Pharoah Sanders.

By the time she entered college as a theater student at Northeastern University in Boston, it was clear that Ms. Kahlil had an intuitive inclination for vocal jazz. Although her formal training had been in European classical music, she began experimenting with innovative, improvisational vocal techniques. She studied voice and music theory at the New England Conservatory, and performed with Ebony Jua, a 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.

Following her studies, Ms. Kahlil spent three years in the Bay Area, where she worked as a vocalist and dancer with the Raymond Sawyer Theatre and Halifu Productions, while performing and recording with the avant-garde jazz trio Infinite Sound. She then returned to Boston, where she worked with Stan Strickland and Sundance and the Art of Black Dance and Music.

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 such companies as Titos Sampas's Tanawa. She also performed with Talib Kibwe (T. K. Blue) and Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), and with Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra.

Since her arrival in Washington, D.C., 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, in which she presented a special performance of the music of Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, the Queen Mother of the classic blues. Ms. Kahlil danced with the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers and Kankouran. She also served as artistic director for the Youth Ensemble of Dancers and Drummers at the Levine School of Music, 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 composition "Fulani Chant" and her rendition of "See See Rider." Her original 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, and with Sweet Honey and James Horner she wrote and recorded original music for the film *Freedom Song*, starring Danny Glover.

In 2005, Ms. Kahlil was a finalist with her own band, MyKa and the Whole World Band, in the annual battle of the bands contest sponsored by Discmakers, and was a winner in the International Songwriting Competition performance category with her original song, "The Jewel Light."

Ms. Kahlil has toured with her band in the islands of Hawaii; performing at the Four Seasons Lodge at Koele, and more recently at Studio Maui, and at Casanova's, performing songs from her CD release *Magical*, featuring her own compositions and arrangements.



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* and *Forever My Darling*); with the Negro Ensemble Company (*Home, Zooman and the Sign, Colored People's Time* and *The Great Mac Daddy*); the New York Shakespeare Festival (*Spunk, Caucasian Chalk Circle, Under Fire* and *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 the Dorothy Height documentary *We Are Not Vanishing*. Ms. Maillard was Conceptual Producer for the 2005 documentary film on PBS's *American Masters, Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice!* Produced and directed by Stanley Nelson of Firelightmedia Films, the film chronicled Sweet Honey's 30th anniversary year (2003).

As a vocalist, she has had the privilege to record with Horace Silver, Betty Buckley and

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, Georgia. SGMKJ!



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

A B.F.A. graduate of Howard University, Ms. Robinson's professional career began at Washington, D.C.'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 the *a cappella* quartet Sweet Honey In The Rock.

Ms. Robinson's career has taken her up many paths, including performances, both on and off Broadway, and in film and studio recordings. 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 a workshop that explores the creative freedom in us all.



A native of Washington, D.C., **Shirley Childress Saxton** is considered by many Deaf and hearing people as an exemplar for Sign interpreting music. Passionate about her work, Ms. Saxton is a skilled professional Sign language interpret-

er 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 most life experiences—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 with the Mental Health Program for the Deaf at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and with Project Access of Deafpride, Inc., who 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 a host of artists, including 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 such stellar writers as Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Audrey Lorde.

Ms. Saxton was first to recognize the need for more African American interpreters, when 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 Saxton, the Mother of Songs Sung in ASL*, pointing out the distinction Ms. Saxton has brought to the field. Ms. Saxton 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. Ms. Saxton's family, sons Reginald and Deon, and sisters Maxine and Khaula, all Sign.