



# SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

## PROGRAM

*There will be an intermission.*



**Saturday, December 12 @ 8 PM**

Zellerbach Theatre

## PROGRAM NOTES

Sweet Honey in the Rock has maintained a rich and distinguished legacy as one of the most revered and treasured a cappella ensembles in contemporary music. Over the past four decades the Grammy® Award-nominated group has stayed true to its adventurous and diverse mixture of blues, African, jazz, gospel and R&B music, with more recent excursions into symphonic music and collaborations into the dance/theatre genre. They recently celebrated their 40th Anniversary, performing a series of special performances across the nation.

Sweet Honey closed out their anniversary year with the release of their first ever holiday single and video with an inspired a cappella version of the classic Christmas carol, "Silent Night." The song was also performed live at their final HOLYDAYS shows. In a message encrypted in the video, Sweet Honey stated, "During this very troubling and turbulent holiday season, we stand with the millions of Americans and people around the world who believe there can be no peace without justice and that black lives and all lives matter. We send our prayers and dedicate our rendition of "Silent Night" and this video to all the families and communities who are grieving over the loss of a loved one. We must continue to demand that our collective voices are heard and will not be silenced until true justice and peace prevails."

The ensemble has embarked on a new chapter in the musical journey this year with their five core members: founding members Louise Robinson and Carol Maillard, as well as Nitanju Bolade Casel, Aisha Kahlil and Shirley Childress (American Sign Language Interpreter who has been performing live with the group since 1981). The group has added guest performers for some performances, including bassist Romeir Mendez. Their traditional show integrates some of their most popular songs, along with renditions of classic hits. Sweet Honey's patented fusion of varied music genres coupled with inspiring songs that embody social commentary and activism, and uplift the human spirit, remain to be at the core of their unique artistry.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Louise Robinson**, a native New Yorker, studied concert bass for six years and attended the High School of Music and Art. A graduate of Howard University with a BFA, her professional career began at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage. Robinson accepted Robert Hooks' invitation to become a member of the new D.C. Black Repertory Company Acting Ensemble. It was out of this theatre company that Robinson, along with Carol Maillard, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Mie formed Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Robinson's colorful 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 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 Casear, Sandra Reeves Phillips and legendary tap dancers Gregory Hines, Avon Long and Joe Attles.

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. She returned to Sweet Honey in the Rock in 2004, and combines her experience in theatre and music to offer a workshop that explores the creative freedom in us all.

**Carol Maillard** was born and raised in Philadelphia. 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.

Maillard is an accomplished actress and has performed in film, television and on stage. Her theatre credits encompass a wide range of styles from musical comedy and revues to drama and experimental. She has performed on and off Broadway with the Negro Ensemble Company, the New York Shakespeare Festival and at the Actors Studio. She can be seen in the feature films *Beloved* and *Thirty Years to Life*. On television, Maillard has appeared in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* and *Halleluiah!* on PBS, and *Law and Order: SVU* and *Law and Order*.

Maillard was Conceptual and Creative Producer for the documentary film *Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice!* on the PBS series *American Masters*. Produced and directed by Stanley Nelson, the film chronicled Sweet Honey's 30th Anniversary year. She also produced the accompanying soundtrack for the film.

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

**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 of Artistes Des Echanges Africaines with Marie Guinier, Casel 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 Schomburg Center for Research and Development and the late Dr. Ewart Guinier of Harvard University. Casel is also the former assistant director of the Art of Black Dance & Music, and director of Young Afrique Dance Company, both in Massachusetts.

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 multi-media history presentation *Black Hands, Blue Seas: The African American Maritime Experience*, and Tribeca Production company's *The Box*. Casel was a finalist in both the 2006 and 2007 International Songwriter's Competition, and a Grammy® Award nominee for Sweet Honey's *Experience...101*, which she produced.

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, contemporary and traditional African vocal styles and techniques. Her performances of "See See Rider" and "Fulani Chant" earned her the title of best soloist from the Contemporary A Cappella Society of America. "Fulani Chant," written by Kahlil, was also included on the soundtrack *Down in the Delta*, directed by Maya Angelou, and in a film produced by the Breast Cancer Fund titled *Climb Against the Odds*. Her composition, "Wodaabe Nights," was featured in the film *Africans in America*.

Kahlil has appeared in Joseph Papp's off-Broadway production of *The Haggadah*, co-composed and performed in the musical *Two Thousand Seasons*, and performed the music of Ma Rainey in the *Jazz in the Palm Court* series at the Smithsonian Institution. Her film credits include *Beloved*, starring Oprah Winfrey, and original music for the film *Freedom Song*, starring Danny Glover. Her arrangement of "Strange Fruit" was featured in *Freedom Never Dies*, a PBS production of the life of Harry Moore. In 2005, Kahlil was a

finalist with her own band, MyKa and the Whole World Band, in the annual Battle of the Bands contest. She is a winner in the International Songwriting Competition performance category with her original song, "The Jewel Light."

A master teacher in voice and dance, Kahlil has taught at the Institute for Contemporary Dance, The Joy of Motion, the Boston Center for the Arts, Leslie College and the D.C. Black Repertory Theatre. She has taught and lectured at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and at Maharishi International University. Kahlil has toured with her band in the islands of Hawaii, performing at the Four Seasons Lodge at Koele and most recently at Studio Maui and Casanova's, performing songs from her CD release *Magical*, featuring her own original compositions and arrangements.

**Shirley Childress** is passionate about her work. She is a skilled professional sign language interpreter having 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 explore sign interpreting as a career option.

Childress has interpreted for students in college and high school classrooms, for employees at staff meetings and conferences, for congregants at religious services and for performing artists and writers. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Deaf Education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and has studied Adult Education at the University of the District of Columbia.

Childress, a native of Washington, D.C., is an avid reader, loves photography and has written several articles about her work as sign language interpreter and her life experiences with her deaf parents. Her family, sons Reginald and Deon, and sisters Maxine and Khaula all sign.

**Art Steele** has pursued parallel interests in personal musical performance and concert audio technologies since 1968 in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. He moved to the Pioneer Valley area in 1970, and while attending and working at the University of Massachusetts, founded and managed Steele Sound Reinforcement Rental, and, as guitarist/ vocalist, fronted the award-winning regional blues band, Southside. He was able to meet and work with many of the blues, jazz and gospel artists whose recordings had influenced and formed the core of his own performances. This duality of focus and livelihood has continued through the years with his events production company Audio Promedia, responsible for technical support solutions for over 200 events per year, and his current group Shake It on Down, which released its fifth CD *Live at Theodore's* in 2006.

During the 1970s while working as a technical consultant in the New England area, Steele met and worked with Sweet Honey in the Rock, first in 1978 at UMASS, then yearly at Smith and Amherst Colleges. Early in the 1980s, Steele was invited to work as sound engineer for the annual Sweet Honey anniversary concerts, and as a consultant to the Sisterfire festivals, both in Washington, D.C. In 1982, Steele started on the road full-time as Sweet Honey's touring sound engineer.

Steele's personal motto is "Who dares, wins." His Audio Promedia company motto is "Unique Purpose-built Production Solutions." After more than 35 years, he continues in the work to which he has dedicated most of his life: to mate the technology he loves with the music he loves in the hearts, minds and ears of the people he loves.