Sweet Honey in the Rock

SAT, FEB 29, 2020, 8 PM | OVERTURE HALL
**Sweet Honey in the Rock** currently consists of the following members:

- Nitanju Bolade Casel
- Barbara Hunt
- Aisha Kahlil
- Carol Maillard
- Rochelle Rice
- Louise Robinson

and featured musician **Romeir Mendez**

Katea Stitt - Tour Manager

#LoveInEvolution

Sweet Honey in the Rock

“In prayer we trust/By hope we live/On truth we stand/From our hearts we give/Love”

Sweet Honey in the Rock®

“If I love you then I have to make you conscious of the things that you do not see”

James Baldwin

Sweet Honey in the Rock® remains among the most vibrant, versatile and ever-relevant musical collectives in music today, both as a performance ensemble and as an ambassadorial African American organization founded on the triumvirate mission of empowerment, education and entertainment. The group currently consists of members Nitanju Bolade Casel, Barbara Hunt, Aisha Kahlil, Carol Maillard, Rochelle Rice, Louise Robinson and featured musician Romeir Mendez on upright acoustic bass and electric bass. Sweet Honey in the Rock is a powerful and unique concert entity that fuses the elastic 360-degree possibilities of the human voice with a theatrical flair that keeps avid audiences returning for more, year after year. Kinetic, cultured and connected, this internationally renowned Grammy Award®-nominated female a cappella vocal quartet has a history of more than four decades of distinguished service. They have created positive, loving and socially-conscious message music that matters as it pertains to spiritual fortification and have consistently taken an activist stance toward making this planet a better place for all in which to live. Thus, this is the theme of the group’s 24th recording, “#LoveInEvolution,” their first studio album in nine years and most contemporary project to date.

“#LoveInEvolution” (released on Appleseed Recordings in partnership with the group’s own She Rocks-5 label and distributed by Entertainment One) crackles with energy and innovation as Sweet Honey in the Rock meshes its finely honed a cappella, world, gospel and folk roots with elements of hip hop, jazz and rhythm and blues at the service of the group’s most arresting collection of original material and timeless covers. Beyond solo-derived pieces, the quartet also writes as an ensemble, developing new material through their improvisational work. The strongest songs on “#LoveInEvolution” come literally ripped from the headlines of today’s world news, railing against systemic injustice as it pertains to people of color—past and present—police brutality, gun control and the Black Lives Matter movement.
ABOUT SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

The album's stark second single, “Second Line Blues,” with its cryptic snare drum cadence, rolls calls the names of innocent people, such as Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland and the children of Sandy Hook Elementary School, who have fallen victim to murder at the hands of anyone, from deranged civilians to police abusing their license to kill. Carol Maillard (a founding member, along with Louise Robinson) states, “Since we started writing this piece, we’ve had to keep adding names…and sadly, we’ll be adding more before things change.” The group released a music video to accompany this haunting, in-your-face reminder of why reforms are necessary for people’s rights to bear arms and the need for more stringent screenings for people placed in positions to police communities.

“I Don’t Want No Trouble at the River” continues this thread as a lamentation and memorial graced in the middle by a group recitation of Dr. Maya Angelou’s poem: “When Great Trees Fall,” proudly granted by her estate in solidarity. Then there is “A Prayer for the World,” which weds “The Lord is My Shepherd” Psalms 23 Bible passage to a bouncy bass fortified hip hop beat of praise.

Nitanju’s brilliantly written “Oh, Sankofa” details the 1920’s Black Wall Street story of Greenwood, Oklahoma, and its destruction at the hands of racists as a sharply telegraphed history lesson, similar to the way her previously penned “Give the People Their Right to Vote” told the story of how Washington, D.C. has no right to vote in Congress due to a purposeful technicality.

Aisha contributed the mind-altering aural arrangement of “The Living Waters,” which speaks fluidly on the ravaging pollution of the world’s waterways in a piece that is as much a headphone’s experience as a mournful cry over the shameful, senseless destruction of natural resources (such as the recent tragedy in Flint, Michigan, in which polluted water poisoned thousands of people and negatively affected the DNA of children there for generations to come). This original composition is a kindred companion to Aisha’s loving arrangement of Marvin Gaye’s 1971 classic “Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology),” which the group has been performing for several years. It includes an introduction that speaks to Gaye’s biography and the significance of the full conscious masterpiece “What’s Going On,” from which the song originated.

“‘Mercy’ stems from a 2010 effort we made to take politically conscious songs from the 60s and 70s by Stevie Wonder, The Isley Brothers and others, and then juxtapose them with sentiments from today,” Maillard explains. “When Sweet Honey in the Rock first started in 1973, many artists from Curtis Mayfield to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young were including political content and social commentary in their music, stemming from the civil rights movement to the folk music of Bob Dylan to the soul music of James Brown. That’s always where our heads have been.” The group covers a second Gaye gem from “What’s Going On,” the prayerful “Wholy Holy” (once recorded by Aretha Franklin).

Lest one begin to think that all of Sweet Honey in the Rock’s music is heavy, “#LoveInEvolution” is also abounding in messages of optimism, faith, pride in self and romantic love. The soulful blues bounce of Carol’s “Same Ol’ Same Ol’ Love” is a fantasy based on some sweet sticky reality about soul mates that rekindle an emotional connection that ended suddenly decades ago. The group shares its deliriously percussive 40th anniversary inspired theme, “Sweet Sweet Honey!” (from 2013’s “Forty & Fierce” shows), as well as the Latin groove “This Place Inside Where I Can Rest” about finding and celebrating one’s spiritual center.

Possibly to become the group’s long elusive radio hit is the buoyant lead single and video “IDK But I’m LOL!,” a handclappin’ song of hope in the face of all that best encapsulates the essence of Sweet Honey in the Rock’s a cappella sound with a catchy hook and contemporary lyrical spin aimed at reaching the ears of young and old alike.

Since its 1973 inception in Washington, D.C. (founded by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon as part of the D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company with Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson and Mie), Sweet

OVERTURE.ORG  |  Sweet Honey in the Rock  3
Sweet Honey in the Rock has continuously evolved into international ambassadors of a cappella vocal and lyrical excellence and musical missionaries of equality, empowerment and education along with peace, love, solidarity and nondenominational spirituality. Most revered for their live performances, the ladies have recorded 24 albums, several specifically for children. Their most recent double CD, “SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK: A Tribute...Live! Jazz at Lincoln Center” (2012), paid homage to their kindred sisters: vocalists and activists Abbey Lincoln, Odetta, Miriam Makeba and Nina Simone, and found the group singing with a jazz trio of “Honey Men” (musical director and pianist, Stacey Wade; acoustic and electric bassist, Parker McAllister; and drummer and percussionist, Jovol Bell).

Sweet Honey in the Rock has performed in many of the world’s most prestigious venues on almost every continent for royal command concerts and festivals. In 2015 alone, they embarked on four U.S. Embassy tours with performances and community outreach in Ethiopia, Peru, Jamaica and Swaziland (and also toured Belize in 2014). In Swaziland, they were one of the headliners of the internationally acclaimed 9th Annual Mountain Bushfire Music Festival (which attracted 20,000 people) and were featured at the 11th Annual Festival of Voices in Hobart, Tasmania, as part of a tour that also included Launceston, and Melbourne and Sydney in Australia. Their February 2016 appearance at New York’s historic Carnegie Hall (with noted guest artists trumpeter and bandleader Terence Blanchard and violinist Regina Carter) holds the distinction of being their 32nd occasion to perform there.

Recent milestones and accomplishments include being commissioned by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Company to compose a score for its 50th anniversary 2008 program, “Go in Grace.” In 2012, they debuted their first orchestral collaboration, writing original lyrics for composer William Banfield’s “Symphony 10: Affirmations for a New World,” a 30-minute work that was co-commissioned and presented by the National Symphony Orchestra (Christoph Eschenbach, music director), and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.; the Minnesota Orchestra, (Osmo Vänskä, music director) at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis; and the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Millennium Park with the Sphinx Orchestra (conducted by Mark Russell Smith) in Chicago. The group also had the honor of performing at the National Memorial Service for Nelson Mandela at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. In acknowledgement of their efforts, Sweet Honey in the Rock was recently presented a distinguished award by the Search for Common Ground Organization and the Keeper of the Flame award by the National Delta Sigma Theta Sorority at its 100th anniversary celebration. Also, not surprisingly, they are a favorite group of former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, having performed by request at the White House.

Sweet Honey in the Rock, which has been the subject of two PBS television specials (including American Masters), is a beloved performance ensemble that, in its 40-plus year history, has maintained a resilient spirit and found a way to successfully fuse the talents of the 24 women who have graced the Sweet Honey in the Rock stage into their patented sound without ever skipping a beat. Ever evolving, the soul survivors once expanded to six vocalists before settling back to four, all in the name of retaining its adventurous spirit, keeping up with the times and reaching greater numbers of like-minded spirits. Last year, they released the holiday single and video “Silent Night” in support of their annual “Celebrate the Holydays” program of spiritual music from around the globe. Fans can stay abreast of their travels on Facebook, Twitter and at www.sweethoneyintherock.org.

“We are very forward thinking as an organization, constantly reevaluating how we can express concepts to uplift and create change through our music and concerts,” says Maillard. "#LoveInEvolution has a more contemporary sound and feel because as people in the group grow and change, we want to hear different things, feel different things and bring fresh elements to our presentation.”
STEP AFRIKA!

THU, APR 16, 2020 | 7:30 PM
CAPITOL THEATER

UNDERWRITTEN BY JEFF & TIFFANY MACK AND JOE & MARY ELLYN SENSENBRENNER

All ages; lap seats available (24 months & under)

overture.org
MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

Nitanju Bolade Casel joined Sweet Honey in the Rock in 1985. Combining her roles as a dancer/choreographer/singer/songwriter/producer/wife/mother, she has also served the group for over 25 years in the position of treasurer. The former assistant artistic director of the Art of Black Dance & Music and director of the Young Afrique Dance Company in Massachusetts, she has taught in multiple dance centers, including Boston University, Roxbury Community College, Joy of Movement Center and, more recently, at Wesleyan University. She has volunteered with the National Association of Music Educators as a public service announcer and donated the use of her composition “Run” to Respond, Inc. (New England’s first domestic violence agency). After years of studying, performing and cultural organizing in the U.S. and abroad, she co-founded Artistes Des Échanges Africaines in Dakar, Senegal, which works in alliance with local artists and organizations to strengthen the cultural ties between African and African American culture. Her film credits include “Beloved,” “Freedom Song” and “The Box,” and in May 2012, she received an honorary doctorate degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary.

Through her publishing company, Clear Ice Music, her compositions have been licensed in multiple disciplines, including the 2006 Australian Broadcasting Company’s educational series, “Sing!,” Pearson’s educational series and Mystic Seaport’s “Black Hands, Blue Seas: The African American Maritime Experience.” Nitanju placed as a finalist in the International Songwriter’s Competitions (2006, 2007) and the Great American Song Contest (2011), runner up in the Song of the Year Contest (2011) and finalist in the 2013 John Lennon Songwriting Contest. As producer of the Grammy-nominated recording “Experience...101” and “A Tribute - Live! Jazz at Lincoln Center,” she also produced Sweet Honey in the Rock’s most current release: “#LovelnEvolution.” Nitanju currently resides on the East Coast with her husband, Oso Tayari Casel (a martial arts legend), and son, Obadele (a hardworking college student).

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

Aisha’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 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, to name a few.

By the time she entered college as a theater student at Northeastern University in Boston, it was clear that Aisha 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 of Music and performed with “Ebony Jua,” a local jazz ensemble that toured the East Coast. While at Northeastern, Aisha directed “M(ego) and the Green Ball of Freedom, Where we at?” by Martie Charles, and performed and directed “Sister Sonji” by Sonia Sanchez.

Following her studies, Aisha 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, Aisha has taught at the Institute for Contemporary Dance, The Joy of Motion, the Boston Center
Aisha’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’ Tanawa. During this time, she also performed with Talib Kibwe (T.K. Blue), Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand) and 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. Aisha 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 cowrote, 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.

Aisha 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 original composition “Wodaabbe Nights” was featured in the film “Africans in America” and her composition “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. Aisha’s film credits include “Beloved,” starring Oprah Winfrey, and with Sweet Honey and James Horner has written and recorded original music for the film “Freedom Song,” starring Danny Glover.

In 2005, Aisha 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.”

Aisha 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 original 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. Carol is an accomplished actress and has performed in film, television, cabaret and on stage. Her theater credits encompass a wide range of styles from musical comedy and revues to drama and experimental. She has worked on Broadway in “Don’t Get God Started,” “It’s So Nice to be Civilized,” “Comin’ Uptown” and “Home and Eubie” and off-Broadway with the Negro Ensemble Company, the New York Shakespeare Festival, the Actors Studio and many regional theater productions. Recently, she reprised her role as Woman Two for a staged reading of Samm-Art Williams’ Tony-nominated play “Home” for Project 1Voice.

She can be seen in the feature films “Beloved” and “Thirty Years to Life.” On television, Carol has appeared in “Halleluiah!” and “For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide,” both for PBS, “Law and Order” and “Law and Order: SVU.”

Carol served as conceptual and creative producer for the 2005 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.

Carol lives in Manhattan and is proud mom to Jordan Maillard Ware (Morehouse grad), who is an accomplished violinist/composer/producer living in Los Angeles.

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. Louise accepted Robert Hooks’ invitation to become a member of the new D.C. Black Repertory Company Acting Ensemble. It was out of this theater company that Louise, along with Carol Maillard, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Mie, formed the a cappella quartet, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Louise’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.

Louise 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.

Louise 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.
ALONZO KING LINES BALLET: FIGURES OF SPEECH

WED, MAY 6, 2020 | 7:30 PM
OVERTURE HALL

MEET THE ARTIST
POST SHOW Q & A

overture.org
CMA Award-winning vocalist Kathy Mattea soars on stage with “Pretty Bird”, her first new album in six years. These songs are the stepping stones that have reinvigorated her dusky alto with a new soulfulness and strength.

KATHY MATTEA

SUN, MAY 17, 2020 | 7 PM
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An anonymous couple in honor of Glenda Noel-Ney and Tim Sauers, VP of Programming and Community Engagement, for their dedication to the arts throughout their careers, and their tremendous influence on making Overture this wonderful place to be introduced to, experience and enjoy the arts.

An anonymous couple because they believe Overture is a beautiful space that everyone should be able to enjoy.

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Jim & Sue Bakke
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ORDERING & INFORMATION
Order online at overture.org.

**Buy in person/phone:** Visit the ticket office located on the main level just off the Rotunda Lobby or call 608.258.4141 Mon-Fri, 11 AM-5:30 PM; Sat, 11 AM-2 PM; Open additional evening and weekend hours on days of ticketed performances.

**Group orders:** Groups of 10 or more receive a discount on most performances. Call 608.258.4159 to make reservations.

Visit overture.org for event listings, links to artist websites, video, audio, directions, parking and much more.

GUEST SERVICES & POLICIES

**Accessibility:** Request accommodations when ordering your tickets. Call 608.258.4452 for information, or to request the following:

- Wheelchair-accessible seating
- Sign language interpretation
- Audio Description
- Other accommodations

More information: overture.org/tickets/faqs

**Children and lap seating:** Every person, regardless of age, must have a ticket to enter the theaters for performances. Discounted lap seats are available for some performances. Children under the age of six are not permitted at certain performances. See our season brochure, visit our website or call 608.258.4141 for information.

**Event Staff:** Stagehand services in Overture are provided by members of Local 251 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

Ushering and other services are provided by Overture volunteers. For information, visit overture.org/volunteer or call 608.258.4962.

**Lost and Found:** Visit the information desk in the Rotunda Lobby or call 608.258.4973.

**Rentals:** For information on renting spaces for weddings, performances, meetings or other events, call 608.258.4163 or email events@overture.org.

**ETIQUETTE**

Please turn off all electronic devices.

Smoking, including the use of e-cigarettes, is prohibited in Overture Center.

The use of cameras or audio recording in the theaters is prohibited without written permission from Overture Center and the performing company’s management.

Food, large bags and other large items are not permitted in the theaters. Bottled water and beverages in Overture provided cups with lids are allowed in the theaters at select shows.

**In consideration of audience members with scent sensitivities and allergies, please refrain from use of perfumes, aftershaves and other fragrances.**

**RESIDENT COMPANIES**

*Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society*  
bachdancinganddynamite.org | 608.255.9866

*Children’s Theater of Madison*  
ctmtheater.org | 608.255.2080

*Forward Theater Company*  
forwardtheater.com | 608.234.5001

*Kanopy Dance Company*  
kanopydance.org | 608.255.2211

*Li Chiao-Ping Dance*  
lichiaopingdance.org | 608.835.6590

*Madison Ballet*  
madisonballet.org | 608.278.7990

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madisonopera.org | 608.238.8085

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