



Sweet Honey in the Rock® *#LoveInEvolution*

"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 missions of empowerment, education and entertainment. Currently consisting of members **Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Aisha Kahlil**, 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 over four decades of distinguished service. They have created positive, loving, and socially conscious message music that matters as it pertains to spiritual fortification, and consistently taken an activist stance toward making this planet a better place for all in which to live. Thus, the theme of the group's 24th recording, *#LoveInEvolution*, Sweet Honey In The Rock's 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 & 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.

The album's stark second single, "Second Line Blues", with its cryptic snare drum cadence, roll calls the names of innocent people such as Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland and the children of Sandy Hook Elementary School that 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 1920s 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, DC 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 on 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 Rocks’ 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, DC (founded by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon as part of the D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company with Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson and Mie), 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, peace, love, solidarity and nondenominational spirituality. Revered most 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 thirty 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, DC; 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, DC. 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 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 that have graced the Sweet Honey In The Rock stage into their patented sound without ever skipping a beat. Ever evolving, the soul survivors once even 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 Sweet Honey In The Rock, "Celebrate the Holydays" program of spiritual music from around the globe. Fans 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."

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