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For immediate release:

Sweet Honey in the Rock Brings Inspiring Music to the Mondavi Center

January 28, 2008; Davis, California—**Sweet Honey in the Rock**, the Grammy Award-winning vocal sextet from Washington, D.C., will bring its soothing harmonies, swinging rhythms, and powerful message of love and redemption to the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** at **UC Davis**. With a style drawing on gospel, spirituals, and hymns of the African American church, the six women merge their powerful voices in rich harmony to the accompaniment of hand-held percussion instruments, delivering a message that variously relates history, points a finger at injustice, encourages activism, and sings the praises of unity and love.

The event will begin at 8 pm on February 23 in the Mondavi Center's Jackson Hall on the UC Davis campus. Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.ARTS (2787) or online at MondaviArts.org. The concert is presented as part of the Mondavi Center's **Global Beat Series**.

Founded in 1973, the *a cappella*, all-female group has long been a symbol of empowerment and a celebration of the rich African American vocal tradition. With several Grammy nominations—including one for its most recent recording, *Experience 101*—and a Grammy Award for Best Traditional Folk Recording for its version of **Leadbelly's** "Old Grey Goose" in 1989, the group is known for its colorful costumes and exuberant stage presence, its superb harmony singing, and its powerful message.

Reviewing one recent performance, the *Boston Globe* called Sweet Honey in the Rock "the real thing," writing that the group's set was "like a musicological survey of the black American experience from Africa through the modern day. The group started with 'Denko,' a Malian song of praise and thanks that began with layered vocals before more complex harmonies and an abundance of hand percussion brought the song to its ecstatically joyful second half... There was a recurring theme of music as community, with blues (identified as the music of migration and the individual) offering up the lone contrast. Jazz (featuring a solo by American Sign Language interpreter **Shirley Childress Saxton**), gospel (represented by the slow, almost doo-wop sway of **Sister Rosetta Tharpe's** 'Precious Memories'), and protest songs all got their due."

Founded by **Bernice Johnson Reagon** out of a vocal workshop she was teaching at the **D.C. Black Repertory Theater Company** more than three decades ago, Sweet Honey in the Rock is rooted in a deeply held commitment to create music out of the rich textures of the African American legacy and traditions, employing a stunning collective vocal prowess to capture the complex sounds of blues, spirituals, traditional gospel hymns, rap, reggae, African chants, hip-hop, ancient lullabies, and jazz improvisation. The group's

name comes from Psalm 81:16 (“and with honey out of the rock I would satisfy thee”), which serves as an apt metaphor for the group’s intention to offer spiritual sustenance in difficult times.

Current members of the group include Dr. **Ysaye Maria Barnwell**, a member since 1979 and composer of many of the ensemble’s contemporary songs; Barnwell has also written a children’s book, *No Mirrors in My Nana’s House*, and released a solo album, *Um Humm*. **Nitanju Bolade Casel**, a member since 1985, has also contributed several compositions and arrangements to the group’s repertoire, and appeared in the film *Beloved*. **Aisha Kahlil**, a member since 1981, is a winner of the Best Soloist award from the **Contemporary A Cappella Society of America**. **Louise Robinson**, an original member of the ensemble, is also an accomplished actress who has appeared in on- and off-Broadway productions of *Reggae*, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and other shows. **Carol Maillard**, another original member, is an accomplished singer, composer, and actress who has performed on Broadway (*Eubie*, *Comin’ Uptown*, *Beehive*), on television (*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*), and film (*Beloved*). Also part of the group is **Shirley Childress Saxton**, an American Sign Language interpreter who has made a unique art form of performing and acting out Sweet Honey in the Rock songs for the hearing impaired.

“Sweet Honey in the Rock offers a concert experience that is a joyful tour through the African American vocal tradition, and we look forward to a vibrant, uplifting performance,” said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center’s executive director.

What: Sweet Honey in the Rock
When: Saturday, February 23 · 8 pm
Where: Jackson Hall
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis
Admission: \$49/\$44/\$39 Adults • \$24.50/\$22/\$19.50 Students & Children
Tickets/Info: 530.754.ARTS (2787)
866.754.ARTS (toll-free)
<http://www.MondaviArts.org>
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