



*A Beautifully
Integrated
Performance
of ASL and Music*

SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

Friday, December 1

Doors/Bar @ 7 pm | Show @ 8 pm

The Paramount Theatre

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Six African-American women join their powerful voices to create a narrative that shares history, points the finger at injustice, encourages activism, and sings the praises of love. Their harmonies and mix of gospel, blues and jazz will inspire you to raise your voice and join their message of hope.

Lift the hands and sing By JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer 10/20/2006
Sweet Honey in the Rock works to make music everyone can hear, feel – and see

When the women of Sweet Honey in the Rock gather to sing, Shirley Childress Saxton is noticeably silent. Rather than lifting her voice along with the other six women in this ensemble, Saxton lifts her hands -- to translate the words, the emotions, even the rhythmic feel of the music into language the deaf and hearing-impaired can readily understand. "For many deaf people, music simply is not a part of their lives," Saxton said, speaking by phone from her home in the Washington D.C. area. "It takes a lot of courage and open-mindedness on the part of deaf people even to set foot in a concert hall. "But it has been a part of the mission of Sweet Honey in the Rock from the beginning to make its performances accessible and inclusive to all people," she said. "And there aren't many performers out there that have been willing to make the interpretation of their work for the deaf an integral part of what they do." Rather than have Saxton present her interpretations from an isolated part of the stage, Sweet Honey in the Rock made certain that Saxton was perceived from the start as part of the ensemble -- an additional "voice" within the harmony of the group. Still, the prospect of finding a way to express in strictly visual terms the musical and emotional complexity of the songs Sweet Honey in the Rock performs is, Saxton admits, a sometimes daunting challenge. "My work as a sign language interpreter is to facilitate communication," she said. "So I always try to focus on the meaning of the song, the entire message it presents. The lyrics are an important part of that, but just as important is the emotional content, and the feeling that the singer communicates through the tone of voice." Saxton said, for example, a song can have lyrics that are sad and troubling, but be sung in a way that sounds joyous. "Aisha (Kahlil) sings a song called 'I'm a Stranger Here,' and she does it in such an impassioned way," Saxton said. "It is about the pain of being alone in a place, even if one is surrounded by those we know and love, and I try to communicate that in my interpretation. "It's an emotion, unfortunately, that many deaf people know too well," she said. "A deaf person in a hearing family can still have those feelings of being isolated and cut off." Then, there are the songs the group performs that use no words. Interpreting these songs, Saxton said, is at once more difficult and yet freeing. "It's freeing in that it allows me to have a little more creative expression in what I do to express what the song is about."