

## 'Sweet Honey in the Rock' addresses women's dilemma

by Sandra Parker

There is a constantly recurring question in the lives of many Black women today: the question of how to remain in the flow of Black cultural tradition yet develop to one's fullest potential. Although some concept of tradition is inherent in the way they conduct their daily lives, many Black women are finding it necessary to re-examine their tradition in seeking to express themselves and their experience. The music of "Sweet Honey in the Rock" offers the beginning chords of answers to this question.

"Sweet Honey in the Rock" is a group of Black women who combine their talents as singers, songwriters, and collectors to make a dynamic musical statement on the Black American experience. Their repertoire runs an exciting span from African chants to children's game songs and prison songs of the rural south, through gospel and blues, to Black women love songs and socio-political statements of today.

Each of the four voices that comprise this unique musical ensemble is a finely tuned instrument with its own texture and range. The distinctive texture and intensity of each voice allows the members to carry out solo responsibility; when joined in a group statement, the result is unique powerful harmonic lines that make for refreshing, exciting Black music.

The group was formed in 1974 by Bernice Reagon, a folklorist and cultural historian for the Smithsonian Institute, evolving out of her work with the

Washington, D.C. Black Repertory Company. The name "Sweet Honey in the Rock" is a traditional gospel song. While there is no actual biblical reference to "sweet honey in the rock," there is a parable of a land where rocks, when cracked, oozed honey. For Bernice Reagon that parable symbolizes Black women in America. "To survive in this culture Black women must become like rocks. We are warm, but that warmth is revealed only to those who really understand the history of Black people's survival."

The four women that make up "Sweet Honey," Bernice Reagon, leader, Evelyn Harris, Patricia Johnson, and Yasmee Williams combine their diverse musical experiences to sing lyrically simple, poetic and profound songs about what is happening to and around them. All together, it makes a whole. Their political statements stand and are equal to their songs about being lovers, mothers, and their traditional Black African and Black American material.

They take all of their experience and bring it in music to the community, spreading and sharing the voice of the Black experience. Sweet Honey's sound in the voice. Their concept stresses the use of the voice as rhythm and instrumentation. Their acapella singing is soulful, forceful, delicate and for real! In presenting their music, they cover a large piece of the total spectrum of Black song, while relating to and singing about our lives. They sing situations - being wronged, being poor, being denied, crying, moaning, preaching and rejoicing - but always leaving you with a feeling of goodness and strength.

Portlanders will have a rare opportunity to experience Sweet Honey when they perform "Black History Through Music," Friday, June 23rd, 8:00 p.m. at

Jefferson High School. New Hope Baptist Choir, dynamic and one hundred voices strong will be filling out the bill. Free child care will be provided.



Barbara and Allen Jones (right) are joined at the wedding reception by Paul and Geneva Knauls.



Among the guests: back row, Eva Jackson, Lonnell and Rose Wilson, Barbara Patterson, Jimmy Nickelson and guest, and Paulette Jackson. Center row: Melvin Nelson, Charlesetta Rutherford, Charles Scarbough, Host and Hostess Arlane and Ray Robinson. Front row: Allen and Barbara Jones, Charles Patterson, Eva and Jack Jackson.



And a good time was had by all: Edwina, Barbara, and Tina.

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