



## FOREWORD

by Harry Belafonte

It is 1997 and as Sojourner probes the secrets of Mars and seeks to give us insights into the universal order of things, humankind is encouraged by this technological phenomenon, examining the meaning of existence. For certain, no matter what is discovered that will tell us of things past and things to come, it must all be measured against its impact on human life, thought and development.

That the scientists have called this probe Sojourner, named after the great Black woman abolitionist Sojourner Truth, says much about what these scientists see as their mission. They seek to release us from the bondage of ignorance that stultifies our intellectual growth and understanding of our relationship to the greater order of things, in much the same way that Sojourner Truth sought to release us from the bondage of ignorance that caused one set of human beings to cruelly enslave another, denying us all the ability to embrace a deeper understanding of who we are and of our dependency on each other.

I have always believed art is the conscience of the human soul and that artists have the responsibility not only to show life as it is but to show life as it should be. Herein lies what is central to the power and the glory of Sweet Honey In The Rock. These women, the tribal and spiritual descendants of Sojourner Truth, have always understood their mission and, in their utterances, have consistently repelled the enemies of truth and helped immeasurably in giving us access to the celebration of our being.

On a recent visit to Central America, as my wife Julie and I moved through the wondrous unfolding of the rain forest and immersed ourselves in the life of the indigenous people of the region, I was deeply struck by what mankind's greed and ignorance have done in its cruel destruction of the forest and its people. I was reminded of Sweet Honey In The Rock's "Are My Hands Clean?" and had to ask myself in the face of this encounter, "are my hands clean?"

In 1994, as I traveled through the country of Rwanda, nestled in central Africa, and observed the aftermath of the devastating genocidal slaughter of 500,000 men, women and children, Hutu against Tutsi, I was again reminded of Sweet Honey In The Rock and recalled her song "Chile, Your Waters Run Red Through Soweto."

In Appalachia I listened to a White woman of no means speak of her coal miner husband, unemployed for seven years and a victim of black lung disease, and of their five children who will inherit the national debt. I reflected on "More Than a Paycheck" and "Ode To The International Debt." The strength of a song, the insightfulness of art!

Sweet Honey In The Rock's mission is not just to entertain, which she so admirably does, but also to open the mind and heart to thoughts about who we are and what we do to one another and to our fellow creatures. In

so doing, she helps us find the courage to commit ourselves to the betterment of all life.

The richness of cultures past and present and all their glorious diversity has been seriously contaminated, and much of them sit on the brink of extinction. They limply grope for ways to resist the onslaught of the forces of profit that has set the scene for the decline.

Most artists do very little to defend the realm. Each generation seems to care less and less about cultural values. The quest for material power and the self-anointing that is lock-step with that quest and what we are prepared to morally surrender are central to the demise. And we are all caught up in this turmoil. The gods of profit do not serve justice, for they are unjust. They have no ethics or moral regard for what they deem expendable, whether it be culture, the rainforest or people. Our only hope is to examine this fact and develop the will and courage to reverse the trend.

For a quarter of a century, Sweet Honey In The Rock has withstood the onslaught. She has been unprovoked by the 30 pieces of silver. Her songs lead us to the well of truth that nourishes the will and courage to stand strong. She is the keeper of the flame.

The songs gathered in this collection are no ordinary assemblage. They do not come from the hummable din of pop culture's Top 10 mindlessness. These songs draw upon much sterner stuff. After all, they are the songs of Sweet Honey In The Rock. And although they, too, are very hummable, their poetry awakens the stilled heart and sparks the mind to things and thoughts that give purpose. Their melodies make the soul sing.

If because of our ignorance our planet becomes like Mars, a dry barren mass, perhaps in some future time when another intelligence from some distant place sends its Sojourner to probe a desolate earth, the rock they would most need to know about would be Sweet Honey.

**HARRY BELAFONTE** is an icon of American popular music. As a young boy, he lived in Jamaica, returning to New York City for high school. At age 17, he joined the United States Navy for a two-year stint. He then settled in New York, where he became involved in the American Negro Theatre and the Dramatic Workshop.

His debut as a singer at the Village Vanguard led to his first recording contract with RCA Victor and two film appearances: *Bright Road* and *Carmen Jones*. His 1955 recording, *Calypso*, was the first pop album to sell one million copies. Mr. Belafonte has starred in the films *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974). He is a humanitarian and political activist who played a key role in the Civil Rights Movement, mobilizing the international arts community in support of the movement. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the first Nelson Mandela Courage Award.