Multicultural Center Freedom Festival featuring……

BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON

• Notes from the Cultural Autobiography of a Freedom Singer
• The Song Culture of the Civil Rights Movement
• African American Sacred Music Traditions

“These days, I come as ‘songtalker,’ one who balances talk and song in the creation of a live performance conversation with those who gather within the sound of my voice.

As a student leader and activist in the Albany Movement, I sang and stood in the sound of the congregational singing of the freedom songs charging the air we breathed. For the first time, I understood how the singing not only pulled us together, but became our articulate collective testimony to all who stood within the sound.” – Bernice Johnson Reagon

For more than 45 years Bernice Johnson Reagon has been a major cultural voice for freedom and justice; singing, teaching—speaking out against racism and organized inequities of all kinds. A child of Southwest Georgia, an African American woman’s voice, born in the struggle against racism in America during the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s. Reagon’s life and work supports the concept of community based culture with an enlarged capacity for mutual respect: for self, for those who move among us who seem to be different than us, respect and care for our home, the environment—including the planet that sustains life as we know it.

Her publications include: We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock, Still on the Journey; We’ll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African-American Gospel Composers; and more recently, If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition. She compiled and wrote the booklet for the two-CD collection Voices of the Civil Rights: Black American Freedom Songs 1960–1965 (Smithsonian Folkways Records).

Among her solo recordings are Give Your Hands to Struggle (1975, re-released by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in 1997) and River of Life (Flying Fish, 1986). She has produced many of Sweet Honey In The Rock recordings, including Sacred Ground (1985), Still On The Journey (1993), and In This Land (1995), all on Earthbeat!/Warner; the children’s recording All for Freedom (1988) and I Got Shoes (1995) on the Music for Little People label; Selections: Sweet Honey In The Rock, 1976–1988 on Rounder Records (1997); Freedom Song (Sony, 2000, sound score for the TNT film of the same title, 2000); Still the Same Me (Rounder Records for younger audiences), and more recently Alive in Australia, Sweet Honey In the Rock (FreedomSong, 2002, Australian release only).

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