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What will the Ebony Heritage Singers do for an encore? Last year, they shared the stage with Grammy Award-winning gospel superstar Kirk Franklin. On Feb. 23, they eavesdropped on a sound check with Sweet Honey in the Rock, a celebrated, all-female a cappella ensemble who performed at the White House earlier in the month.

"How do you top that?" asked Ebony Heritage conductor Donna Cox, professor of music.

Sweet Honey in the Rock mixed blues with jazz, fine-tuning their repertoire for the evening’s sold-out Diversity Lecture Series performance at the Schuster Center in downtown Dayton.

"Feel your life change when your spirit is in control," they sang in rich, strong harmony. "Listen, listen to the voice."

Hours later, they raised their voices again, captivating a diverse crowd with songs of justice, healing and freedom.

But for a few moments, in a darkened, mostly empty Schuster Center, they paused to talk to students about their tour with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the enduring power of music and how they blend their voices.

"Do any of you have perfect pitch, or are you just guessing what feels most comfortable?" asked one student. Sparking laughter, Ysaye Barnwell didn’t miss a beat: "What you just said."

-Teri Rizvi