

# Bosque County Today



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***Viva la voce***

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Flying in from Nice, France last Thursday, sublime soprano Amy Christianna Blake brought international allure, resonating spectacular vocals and operatic flair to the small Central Texas town on a wintry wet Sunday afternoon with her program "Shall We Dance." The Tin building theatre in Clifton audience was mesmerized in an exceptional recital by Blake and accompanying pianist Mary Dibbern, the Dallas Opera's music director for education and family programs.

Be ready for a spectacular afternoon of music worthy of the Bass Hall, the Meyerson or the Houston Opera, Punky Penberthy said in her introduction. Blake combined a rich, expressive soprano with dynamic, dramatic interpretations of show tunes and light opera. Her agility of voice, warm phrasing of the word, beautiful appearance and charm drew in the audience from the first notes.

"When we were creating the program, Mary commented that I had a ton of dances and waltzes selected," Blake said, explaining her musical choices for the program. "That remark sparked a memory. A friend had said that life is like dancing, and we do our best to learn the steps." A program in a diversity of languages, songs and styles took the audience on a musical journey from the first invitation to dance to the first love to the first kiss and evolving love, which sometimes brings melancholia and tristesse.

In her elegant purple halter dress and black boa, Blake playfully invited the audience to dance with the opening piece "Shall We Dance," from the musical "The King and I." She followed it with "Je veux vivre," – I want to live – from Romeo and Juliette, explaining that after the invitation to dance, follows the desire to live in love, in dancing. The clear, bright piano's notes and Blake's exquisite scales of notes in "Nuits D'étoiles," took the guests swirling into a starlit ballroom, as Juliette floats on air, lost in her memories of the dance with her love. Blake had asked the audience to let the song resonate in the room as she went into Edvard Grieg's intense "Ich liebe dich," symbolizing Juliette's realization of her feelings for Romeo. "Ich liebe dich wie nichts auf dieser Erden, in Zeit und Ewigkeit," – I love thee more than all things under heaven; o love of mine to all eternity.

"And after love there is The Kiss," Blake said in introduction of the expressive, spirited and joyful waltz "Il Bacio" by Luigi Arditi. "And not just any kiss, but Il Bacio in Italian! You want to live forever with that one guy." Before intermission brought the signature song of girl appealing to her father to understand her immeasurable, deep love - "Il mio Babbino

Caro,” sung by the great sopranos of the world like Maria Callas and Renee Flemming. Blake did them proud, singing the aria solemnly, pleadingly, hands in lap. “She is marvelous,” fellow singer and local choir director Karen Thomasy said. “She has a very even voice, from upper to lower register; there are no switches in her voice as she transitions. It is a delightful, beautiful performance.”

The intermission literally marked the transition to songs symbolizing more mature love and understanding of life. “Sometimes winter comes and one is alone,” Blake said introducing Solvig’s Song from Peer Gynt, now wearing a beautiful black dress and elbow long gloves. “But hope stays strong.” By Strauss and Czardas were exuberant examples to not take things too seriously in life, Blake said draping her expressive boa over her shoulders. “These songs are a perfect recipe for this crazy thing called life,” Blake said. “Keep falling in love with life, with love itself and keep dancing.”

“Sweet Melody of Night” brought a soft moment of delight, before the last waltz of the day “Love is where you find it.” The music, conjuring up Arabian nights, reminded the audience that love is where you find it, fate designed it; love is all around you, it surrounds you. Gracing the Tin Building Theatre with her talent, magnetic performance and charm, Blake’s Sunday’s recital brought an international nightingale to town, singing a tribute to life and love and dance. The soprano, a Texas Tech University graduate, has sung roles with the Nice Opera, the Franz Liszt Festival in Levens, France, Opera Panama, the Tanglewood Music Center, Opera Brooklyn, the Natchez Opera Festival. She was a finalist in the 2005 Lyric Opera Center for American Artists competition.



Mary Dibbern, pianist and Amy Blake, soprano