

# A little of everything from musical quartet was a perfect break from the stresses of life Blake stylishly open Bermuda Festival

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Musical quartet Blake provided a stylish and enjoyable opening to this year's Bermuda Festival.

Opera. Movie themes. Pop. Broadway. Gospel. And a hymn, for good measure. A little of everything, and every piece designed to tug at the heartstrings.

Blake: four young men with matinee idol good looks, who have the added qualities of being highly capable, classically trained vocal musicians and more-than-adept English public school banterers, who parlay these attributes into a savvy performance and engaging stage presence.

And it all comes together in the way Blake promises. Those who were at Tuesday evening's concert may remember that the quartet members, in the concert programme, say: 'We prefer not to think of what we do as classical or pop, we just hope that it's emotional, and that you can take a well-deserved break from the stresses of life for just one evening.'

Tony Bennett's revived career initiated this genre: a song book approach to music that a public, starved of anything remotely resembling it for far too long, embraced. Newcomers such as Harry Connick Jr and more recently Michael Buble, all at least to some extent channelling the Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr et al Rat Pack incarnation, have emerged.

Clad in Blues Brothers suits, clouded in enough smoke to have been caused by a five alarm fire and posing moodily in its depths while spotlights played on them until summoned out to sing, the Rat Pack would seem to have been a big influence here.

The recipe has been successful Ollie Baines, Humphrey Berney, Jules Knight and Stephen Bowman's rendering of 'Swing Low' was the chosen anthem for the English rugby team's World Cup campaign in 2007 to 'All Of Me' composed by Simon May as a celebration of last year's Royal Wedding. They are in demand at home and abroad, and are about to release a fourth CD.

'Harmony' was the often repeated word of the evening, the members of Blake expressing their admiration for artists as diverse as The Backstreet Boys and Simon and Garfunkel, and certainly it was the a cappella performances that stood out. It goes without saying that 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' is a beautiful piece of music with lovely lyrics, and their arrangement for four voices was masterful, producing truly exquisite harmonies and sung with great depth of feeling.

The Henri Mancini classic 'Moon River' was glorious as well. It is a favourite of theirs as this was the first piece they sang together, and like 'Bridge over Troubled Water', has exquisite lyrics that would move almost anyone.

'Hallelujah', a bluesy gospel piece by Leonard Cohen was another high point and an opportunity to nail some wonderful harmonies, producing a really glorious sound.

Certainly succeeding in eliciting an emotional response, 'Bring Him Home' (Broublil/Schonberg/Kretzmer) was dedicated to all those in the audience who had lost a parent, and it was another beautiful expression of the harmonic quality of this quartet.

The heart-rending theme from 'The Deer Hunter' and 'Time To Say Goodbye', made famous by the tenor Andrea Bocelli, were more highlights.

Despite acoustic difficulties that plague the Fairmont Southampton amphitheatre, often creating an imbalance of sound in parts of the auditorium, and the tinned quality of much of the accompanying music, it was a great evening of song, and thanks to Blake's engaging delivery, truly accessible and enjoyable for a broad spectrum of concert goers.

It was, in fact: 'A well-deserved break from the stresses of life for just one evening,' and a great opening for the 2012 Bermuda Festival.

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