

Headline: A night at the opera? It's become a family tradition for Blake Robinson

By Michael J. Lewis

The typical 15-year-old male brain is filled with hundreds of things.

Girls. Sports. Hanging out with friends. TV. Music. Finding a way to finish that term paper before the teacher gives you an F.

A few things that are hardly ever, ever, ever in a teenage boy's brain? The beauty and wonder of the opera. Whether the soprano in Act II hit the right note. What the deeper meaning of the solo in Act 3 is.

Yep, teenagers and opera go together like peanut butter and motor oil. But Blake Robinson, for many many reasons, is not your typical 15-year-old. And for the last two years, he has been adopted by perhaps the most unusual Friends of Jaclyn adoption organization: The Los Angeles Opera.

Since March 2014, the opera, led by maestro and world-famous member of the "Three Tenors" Placido Domingo, has welcomed Blake with open arms. Blake, his younger brother Aidan, and parents Kim and Brian have become regular opera "groupies," going to 6-7 operas per year the last two years.

And Blake is no mere spectator. He sometimes gets to call "places!" to the cast right before the show starts, getting everyone set in position. He's gotten to sit on the catwalk of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (the opera's home), watching the show from above. He's even gotten to wear a headset during a performance and be part of all the "direction" that goes on that the audience never sees.

It has been a transformative and eye-opening experience for the whole Robinson family, that started when Placido Domingo's grandson, Dominic heard about Friends of Jaclyn from a friend and soon let FOJ know the opera was looking for an adoptee.

"When I heard they were going to adopt me, I was kind of surprised, because I'd never seen opera at all," Blake said in a recent FaceTime interview. "All I knew is that it was long, and boring, and usually in a different language. But now I love it."

Blake certainly deserves some joy in his life, after everything he's been through. The Los Angeles native has had 12 brain surgeries in his life since

being diagnosed with neurofibromatosis with an optic glioma (brain tumor) when he was 18 months old.

Since his original diagnosis Blake has not only had those dozen surgeries, he's endured acute hydrocephalus, suffered more tumors on his pelvis and other parts of his body, and more recently endured seizures.

It has all added up to an incalculable amount of hours in hospital rooms and rehabilitation areas in the Los Angeles area.

But with Blake having gone now nearly two years since his last shunt revision, some happier times are able to be experienced.

“He's such a smart, funny kid and we're so lucky and thrilled to have him and his family be a part of our family,” said Stacy Brightman, the opera's Senior Director of Education and Community Engagement. “Blake was a little shy at first, but he really knows his opera now. His intellectual curiosity is fantastic, and we love having him here every time he and his family come out.”

Kim Robinson, Blake's mom, said she loved the idea of her son being adopted by the opera, and that the entire group “gives us such positive emotion, a group that really supports him.”

Of all the operas he's seen so far, Blake said he really liked “Moby Dick” the best, and that sitting up close and seeing the incredible performances has been inspiring.

Blake has even gotten his school, Arete Academy, fired up about opera. In March the whole student body is coming to a performance of “The Magic Flute,” with Blake as the host. He helped arrange the details and convinced the school administrators to bring the students out.

“It should be a lot of fun, hopefully (the other kids) will really like it,” Blake said.

If they open their minds up like Blake has, who knows? Opera may become a major topic of discussion for teenage boys in the L.A. area.

And with all Blake Robinson has been through, wouldn't that be the most unlikely miracle of all?

