

Showcase, Alexander show that less can offer more

By Howard Reich
TRIBUNE CRITIC

Yes, it's possible for a jazz club to survive a grand opening and quickly return to a semblance of normalcy. The reborn Jazz Showcase proved it late Thursday night, when the club launched its second week in its new quarters, in the South Loop.

Most of the technical glitches that surfaced last week, when the Showcase reopened after a year-and-a-half's hiatus, were vanquished. The air-conditioning pumped cold air with a vengeance. Liquor flowed from the bar. The bathroom worked like a charm (well, we can report that at least the men's room did).

Better still, the room sounded superior to a week ago, though this had more to do with the players onstage than anything else. Because the new space is so reverberant, a large group—such as the Junior Mance band that played last week—can produce too much

sound for the setting (this issue might be resolved once the club installs drapes, which could absorb some echo).

But when a trio takes the stage, the acoustics seem practically ideal, a fact that the Monty Alexander Trio took full advantage of. Huddled close to one another, pianist Alexander, drummer George Fludas and bassist Lorin Cohen produced a big, bold ensemble sound that filled every crevice of the room.

As for the Showcase, it's now back to operating seven nights a week, with Chicago artists playing Mondays through Wednesdays, visitors headlining Thursdays through Sundays.

Long may it swing.

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Monty Alexander plays through Sunday; Ken Chaney Quartet, Monday; Alfonso Ponticelli's Swing Gitan, Tuesday; Willie Pickens Trio, Wednesday; Barry Harris Trio, Thursday-June 29; \$10-\$20; 806 S. Plymouth Ct.; 312-360-0234.



The reborn and revitalized Jazz Showcase provided an ideal acoustic setting for pianist Monty Alexander and his trio.