

Alexander will feel right at home

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STAFF WRITER

Monty Alexander's trip here for the Rochester International Jazz Festival is a sort of homecoming for him, back to a place where he was able to experiment and let loose in his early years.

"I have a strong recollection of my Rochester, New York, experience," says the jazz pianist, who will play at Kilbourn Hall on Thursday night.

Alexander, whose heyday in Rochester was back in the late '60s and early '70s, remembers it with no uncertain detail. He remembers Jefferson Road. He remembers the motel, the Rown Towner, where he would play. He remembers the name of Rochester's popular jazz disc jockey, Will Moyle, and a guy who owned "several great music venues in Rochester," Jim Foley.

He even recalls that there was a "little restaurant up the side when



Provided photo

Monty Alexander's Jamaican roots are evident in his music.

you went up the lobby," at the motel. "It was a trio kind of a place. They invited me once and I started going up there quite frequently."

If you go

Who: Monty Alexander Trio.

When: 6 and 10 p.m. Thursday.

Where: Kilbourn Hall.

Cost: Free to club pass holders; \$25 cash only if there's any room left.

And of course, he remembers that "frequently" meant about twice a year, for two to four weeks at a time, the first being around 1969, when "I was green."

Jack Presberg, a retired physician and amateur musician from Rochester, remembers hearing Alexander in the Henrietta motel.

"He swings and he's very lyrical," says Presberg. "If he plays a ballad, he could really make you cry."

Alexander's explorations have

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

Because they were playing smaller venues, many people missed two of last year's most talked-about performers, Carolyn Wonderland and Jake Shimabukuro.

In a piece of inspired packaging, the festival has put these two stars together tonight at the Eastman Theatre. Wonderland, a big-voiced bluesy singer and guitarist from Austin, Texas, and her band should be able to fill the venue with sound. We'll see what Shimabukuro, with his little ukulele and his charming but almost shy stage manner, has to offer.

Holly Cole. In a festival loaded with female vocalists, at least two of them know their Tom Waits songbook. Liane Carroll did a couple of Waits songs during her show on day two; Cole did a whole album of Waits songs a few years ago. She sings at 5:30 and 7:15 p.m. at the Harro East Ballroom.

Bonerama. Any band with five trombones is not lacking in bluster. These guys were a big hit at the fest a couple of years ago, and return with their blend of originals and rock covers such as Jimi Hendrix's "Crosstown Traffic." Bonerama plays at 8:30 and 10 p.m. in the Big Tent, and again Wednesday at 5:30 and 7:15 p.m. in the Harro East Ballroom. □