

# GO AHEAD, MAKE MY FILM SCORE

**N**OW, I ask you, could Dirty Harry make a jazz pianist's day? You can bet a fistful of dollars he could — and did.

That was when Clint Eastwood, who produced and directed the soon-for-Sydney film *Bird*, contracted Monty Alexander to play on the soundtrack of the movie, which is based on the life of the seminal jazz figure Charlie Parker, the great black "Bird" who died in 1955.

Through complex technology, Parker's original solos were isolated from the old tapes and records and retained, with the addition of state-of-the-art sound from top musicians of today.

"I went to the studio and we were playing along with the tapes of Charlie Parker," Alexander said. "It was as if this man was alive, and like

we were all really working together. He's one of our great heroes — it was really a thrill."

He also confessed that it was rather an eerie experience. After all, Monty Alexander was 10 years old when Bird died, yet there he was bopping along with the awesome altoist on classics such as the film's opener, *Lester Leaps In*.

There have been other musical heroes in the life of the Jamaica-born pianist. At a very early age, he got hip to Eddie Heywood, and "was really hit by Satchmo" when trumpet giant Louis Armstrong toured the West Indies. "It was like the Messiah came to town..."

There was something about Satchmo's playing that made the young Alexander want to carry on the tradition of just making music that

was uplifting. The fun that Satchmo clearly enjoyed as he played captivated the boy.

"Nobody should be having so much fun, and I wanted a piece of the action," he explained. "Nat King Cole, who was probably my greatest hero, had that same thing on the piano — he was swinging and the notes just jumped out at you like little bells."

Darkly handsome, with a cultured West Indian accent as colourful as the cadences of a calypso, Alexander the Great may have at one time been taught piano by "two ladies from England", but his real-life education began when he reached Florida at the age of 17.

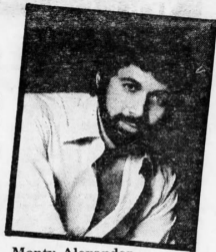
"I worked at this place in Miami, and it was a — well, I don't know, they had ladies of the night there, and

gentlemen of the night and all that sort of thing. It was quite an introduction to America for me."

Frank Sinatra's buddy Jilly Rizzo stopped, looked and listened to the young pianist, and promptly hired him for his popular New York Club.

With a name like Alexander, he couldn't be blamed if he had led a ragtime band, but heritage will out. "I'd start with a reggae band," he laughed. Despite this, his new Concord Jazz album, *Ivory and Steel Jamboree*, isn't of the genre. "Much as I love all the things that came out of the reggae generation and Bob Marley's great talent, this is a real calypso record."

*The Monty Alexander Trio, which includes bassist John Clayton and drummer Marvin Smith, appears at*



Monty Alexander.

*the Sydney Town Hall on Thursday at 8.15 pm.*

□ JOYA JENSON