

Piece of home

Monty Alexander's love of Jamaica flows through his work

By Rick Nowlin
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

You may be able to take **Monty Alexander** out of Jamaica — but don't even try taking Jamaica out of Alexander.

Arguably the Caribbean island nation's foremost jazz export, he's now stepping forward with his jazz-reggae project **Yard Movement**, which will perform at 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday at the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild.

The sextet will record a live CD in the process, following in the footsteps of such ensembles as the **Count Basie Orchestra** and the **Dizzy Gillespie Alumni All-Star Big Band**, in which Alexander also has participated.

The band, named for another live CD he recorded for Island Records five years ago, refers to two Jamaican expressions — "yard" meaning "home" or "homeland," and the "movement" of the people grooving to the music.

"The last few years," Alexander says, "I've been taking pleasure in making music that taps into my heritage as a Jamaican."

The Kingston-born-and-bred pianist, a U.S. resident since 1963, grew up listening to **Nat "King" Cole** and **Louis Armstrong**. He has

worked with **Milt Jackson**, **John "Dizzy" Gillespie**, **Clark Terry** and **Sonny Rollins** and recorded more than 50 albums, mostly straight-ahead jazz, under his own name.

The combination between jazz and reggae works, Alexander says, because he doesn't place music in strict categories.

"I see music from the standpoint of music," he says. "I just fit in comfortably. I grew up with R&B and all those sensibilities — it was all [just] music for me."

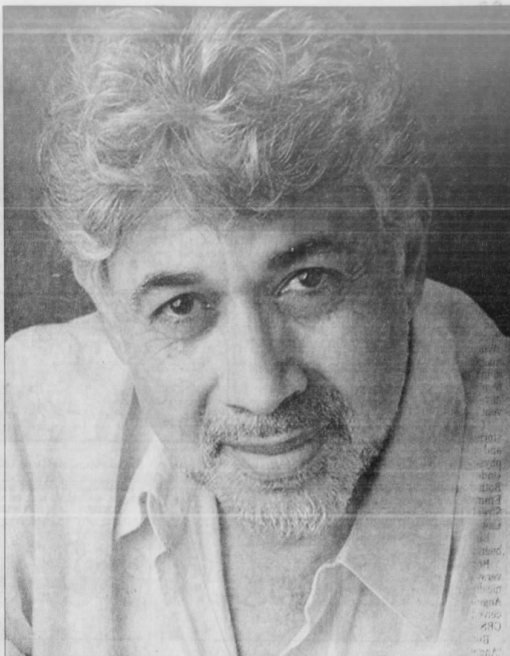
But as far as Yard Movement goes, "To do it effectively," Alexander says, "I use Jamaicans."

The band includes **Christopher McDonald** on keyboards, **Glen Browne** on bass, **Desmond Jones** on drums, **Wayne Armond** on rhythm guitar and **Robert Browne** on lead guitar.

And if it's reggae, you have to pay homage to the man who put the genre on the map: singer, composer and social conscience **Bob Marley**. Indeed, Alexander's 1999 Telarc CD "Stir It Up" was a tribute to his late countryman.

"I am a disciple of what the man was talking about," Alexander says. "Bob was a powerful messenger."

Earlier this year, Alexander released "Monty Meets Sly and Robbie," in which he performs in a trio setting



with the renowned rhythm section of drummer **Sly Dunbar** and bassist **Robbie Shakespeare**, known in Jamaica as the Rhythm Twins.

Does Alexander, who last performed at the Guild in February, expect people to dance in the aisles?

He wouldn't entirely oppose it, citing performances the band did in Eu-

rope where space was cleared for dancing.

You see, according to Alexander, reggae is "music from the neck down; it gets to the sensual places. It's a feeling thing."

For ticket information, call the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild at 412-322-0800.

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PAGE C-7