

CONCERTS

1st Monty Alexander Jazz Festival this weekend at Avalon

EASTON—The Avalon Theatre this weekend will become the scene for inauguration of the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival, presented by Chesapeake Chamber Music as part of its ongoing efforts to expand and enhance its musical offerings on the Eastern Shore.

This offering will contain several last-minute surprises that will go a long way toward "expanding and enhancing," including the addition of an unannounced artist to perform with the Monty Alexander Trio and free admission for students at a unique "Conversation on Jazz" that will help open up the world of jazz to newcomers and longtime aficionados alike.

This year's festival expands upon last year's popular concert by the Monty Alexander

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Trio. The 2009 concert was offered as an experiment to test the Eastern Shore's enthusiasm for small ensemble jazz. The experiment was a success by any measure. The audience appreciated Monty Alexander, and the performer responded in kind — to the audience, to the theater and to the area itself.

In the discussions with Alexander that followed, the single concert experiment grew into a three-evening festival, and the acclaimed jazz pianist accepted CCM's invitation to become the new festival's artistic director, as well as its namesake.

Alexander also took on the challenge of finding a "rising star" to grace the new festival. It did not take long before he selected the Grace Kelly Quintet as the first to be invited. The group kicks off the festival tonight with an evening concert.

Kelly, an alto saxophonist who turned 18 earlier this summer, already has five jazz CDs to her credit, one of which was listed earlier this year by *DownBeat Magazine* as among the best jazz recordings of the decade.

Kelly and her quintet have performed worldwide to critical acclaim, and she has been recognized by the jazz community as one of the true rising stars of the genre. For three years running she has been named "Best Jazz Act" in her hometown of Boston. And for the second year in a row she has been named to the "All Saxophonist Rising Star" list in the 58th Annual *DownBeat Magazine* Critics Poll.

Established jazz musicians have taken enthusiastic note of Kelly's appearance on the scene. She has received ac-

colades from the likes of Monty Alexander, Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., Marlain McFarland, Ann Hampton Callaway (who detected "the boundless spirit and imagination of a natural artist"), Dave Brubeck and Keith Lockhart, among others. Marsalis commented on her natural musical ability as well as her "ability to adapt that is the hallmark of a first-class jazz musician."

Kelly will be accompanied by the members of her touring band, including trumpeter Jason Palmer, Doug Johnson on piano, Evan Gregor on bass and Jordan Perlon on drums.

After last year's sold-out concert, Alexander should be a familiar figure to long-standing fans of jazz as well as relative newcomers to the genre. A Saturday evening concert featuring the Monty Alexander Trio highlights this year's festival.

"Trio" may be a misnomer in this case, however, since Bobby Thomas Jr., a hard drummer who has performed with Alexander in the past and shares his Caribbean influence, recently accepted an invitation to join the trio for its

concert.

Alexander's career spans five decades. He has built his reputation by exploring and bridging the worlds of American jazz, popular song and the music of his native Jamaica, while finding in each a sincere spirit of musical expression. He has performed and recorded with artists from every corner of the musical universe and entertainment world: Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Ray Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Clark Terry, Quincy Jones, Ernest Ranglin, Barbara Hendricks, Bill Cosby and Bobby McFerrin, among others.

Alexander was ranked among the top five jazz pianists in journalist Gene Rizzo's 2005 book, "The Fifty Greatest Jazz Piano Players of All-Time."

In addition to Thomas, Alexander will be accompanied by bassist Lorin Cohen, who returns to Easton after having performed here in last year's concert, and drummer Winard Harper.

Saturday afternoon, Alexander and Kelly will sit

down with jazz critic and pianist Bill Edgar, who will moderate an informal "Conversation on Jazz" between the two performers and the audience. This will present an unparalleled opportunity to glimpse the art of jazz from the perspective of jazz artists themselves. Expect this conversation to be accompanied by musical demonstrations to illustrate the discussion. In line with Chesapeake Chamber Music's educational mission, this event will be free to students with a current student ID.

All festival events will take place at the Avalon Theatre in Easton. The concerts will start at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and the "Conversation on Jazz" will begin at 3 p.m. Saturday. Doors will open a half hour before the scheduled start time.

Additional information can be found on the CCM website at www.chesapeakechambermusic.org/jazz. Tickets may be purchased online, by calling Chesapeake Chamber Music at 410-819-0380 or at the door.



Monty Alexander will perform Saturday night during the first Monty Alexander Jazz Festival at the Avalon Theatre.



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