

Jazz fest marks six years in town

Jazz returns to Easton this weekend as the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival marks its sixth year at the Avalon Theatre. **N**

Jazz pianist Monty Alexander, the festival's artistic director and namesake, will headline the festival Saturday night with his music that crisscrosses and fuses jazz roots, the American Songbook and the sounds of his native Jamaica.

Alexander has performed and recorded with artists from every corner of the musical universe and entertainment world, including Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Ray Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Quincy Jones and Bobby McFerrin.

Monty Alexander and Friends will take the stage at 8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 5. The band will feature Houston Person on saxophone, Hassan Shakur on bass, Obed Calvaire on drums and Randy Napoleon on guitar. The concert, "Monty Alexander: Remember Mr. S. and Jilly's — Celebrating Frank Sinatra 100 Years," will include reflections on Alexander's time with Sinatra at the legendary Jilly's Club in New York City and will feature some special guest vocalists, to be announced the night of the concert.

At 8 p.m. Friday, jazz vocalist and Grammy nominee René Marie will open the festival with her quintet. With her latest album, "I Wanna Be Evil (With Love to Eartha Kitt)," nominated for the 2015 Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocalist, Marie creates a fresh perspective on Kitt's music. She blends jazz, blues, soul, folk, rock and gospel.

New York-based tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander will lead Saturday afternoon's concert at 2 p.m. The concert also will feature jazz vocalist Alicia Olatuja, whose solo with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" reached millions of viewers at President Obama's 2013 inauguration.

Baltimore classical and jazz pianist Jermaine Gardner will open Sunday's concert at 2 p.m. Gardner performed with singer Stevie Wonder when he was only 3 years old and the singer presented him with a Stevie Wonder studio keyboard. He has performed at the White House and has appeared on numerous TV shows.

A festival tradition will continue at 10:30 a.m. Saturday with a free New Orleans jazz concert in Thompson Park by the Conservatory Classic Jazz Band. The band then will lead a line parade to the Tidewater Inn, where a jazz brunch (reservations required) at 11:30 a.m. will precede the afternoon showcase.

The Conservatory Classic Jazz Band was formed in 2003 to bring the sounds of traditional jazz to the Washington, D.C., audience. The full band includes seven highly accomplished jazz musicians, who play New Orleans style, Chicago style, small-group swing and mainstream jazz. Their repertoire encompasses the music of Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Bix Beiderbecke, Bessie Smith, Eddie Condon, Benny Goodman and other jazz pioneers, in addition to the Great American Songbook of such composers as George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Hoagy Carmichael. **N**

Caterina Zapponi and the All Stars kicked off the festivities with a Thursday night concert at the Academy Art Museum.

Presented by Jazz on the Chesapeake, the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival is a program of Chesapeake Chamber Music. For further information, visit ChesapeakeJazz.org.