



Monty Alexander Harlem-Kingston Express: Vol 2: The River Rolls On review – punchy riffs and playful quotes

(Motema)

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Monty Alexander, the entertaining Oscar Peterson-influenced Jamaican pianist and occasional singer, played straight-ahead jazz-trio music and the jazz-reggae repertoire from this set on his recent week at Ronnie Scott's. On these 13 tracks, mixing originals and covers, Alexander imparts a laid-back Caribbean lilt to hits as familiar as Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come* and Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?*, while Bob Marley's *Redemption Song* gets a sensitive soul-vocals interpretation from Wendel Ferraro. Alexander has a constitutional mistrust of anything hinting at navel-gazing, so even on a mood piece like *Concierto D'Aranjuez*, he's soon prodding the yearning tune with punchy chord-riffs, frenetic repeat-note stabs and playful quotes from Miles Davis's *So What?* But the somewhat McCoy Tyner-like *Hurricane Come and Gone* is vivacious, *Sleaky* is a coolly rocking blues, and *The Harder They Come* chugs invitingly over reggae organ and drums. Alexander's singer wife Caterina Zapponi brings a graceful directness to the title track, guest artist George Benson makes a subtly restrained guitar contribution to *Love Notes*, and the descriptively named *Skamento* is standout. Three live tracks at the end find Alexander's band at their most animated, particularly the percussion section.