

GUEST COMMENT

Enjoy jazz in Easton for Labor Day weekend

By AL SIKES

Five years ago, legendary jazz pianist Monty Alexander agreed to come to Easton and present a jazz concert on Labor Day Weekend. The concert was sponsored by Jazz on the Chesapeake, a program of Chesapeake Chamber Music. Since 2010, when the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival was born, the festival has grown from two concerts to six over the holiday weekend. The festival has become known for the top-ranked quality of the performers. Even the emerging artists are often the Juilliard-pedigreed, much-in-demand young artists making waves on the New York scene.

Jazz is America's gift to the world. Easton has now become a

stage on the world tour of the best jazz artists. Hundreds of Shore residents, who never considered themselves jazz enthusiasts, now support the festival as benefactors and patrons and the festival is drawing a growing number of jazz lovers from states near and far.

A core of locals serves as ballast for the festival and this year, we are encouraging locals to ditch the drive to the beach and spend the weekend with us in Easton listening to what artistic director Monty Alexander calls "uplifting music" — "a delectable meal feted with outstanding and varied ingredients." Tickets are affordable and the lineup is outstanding.

The festival opens with guitar virtuoso Frank Vignola on Thurs-

day evening at the Academy Art Museum. Trumpeter Etienne Charles will headline Friday evening's concert at the historic Avalon Theatre, the festival's intimate club venue, which just speaks jazz to performers and audiences alike.

On Saturday, an afternoon tribute concert to Dave Brubeck, featuring his alto saxophonist Bobby Militello, will be followed Saturday night by Monty Alexander's recreating his 2011 performance, Jazz at Lincoln Center, with his trio and some of jazz greats including vocalists Allan Harris and James DeFrances, and tenor saxophonist Houston Person. *The New York Times* calls Harris a "baritone crooner," while DeFrances, a

rising big band vocalist, has been praised for his Frank Sinatra-style voice.

Wrapping up the weekend on Sunday afternoon, returning jazz and gospel virtuoso, Dee Daniels, along with the Jana Leslie Singers and the Alive at 5 Band of Christ Church Easton, will bring audiences together with a unique blend of spirituals, gospel and jazz.

Easton has embraced the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival and to celebrate the local support, this year we are offering a free New Orleans jazz concert featuring the Conservatory Classic Jazz Band at 11 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 30, at Thompson Park (on the corner of Washington and Dover streets) in downtown Easton. We hope resi-

dents and visitors of all ages will come out and enjoy this wonderful jazz music as we celebrate the festival's 5th anniversary.

The band will then lead a second line parade to the Tidewater Inn, where lunch will be served from 11:30 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. for those with reservations, preceding the festival's afternoon Brubeck tribute at the Avalon. Come be a part of this amazing experience of Jazz on the Chesapeake. You won't regret staying home this Labor Day Weekend and hopefully many Labor Day Weekends to come! To purchase tickets to the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival, visit ChesapeakeJazz.org.

Al Sikes is the producer of the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival.