

Jazz Spectacular was real bargain for a lucky few

ALL-STAR JAZZ SPECTACULAR — Featuring Monty Alexander Quintet, Stephane Grappelli Quartet and Four Freshmen Sunday night at Sunrise Musical Theater. Sponsored by Gold Coast Pops/Jazz Society.

By Ray Recchi

Entertainment Writer

The small but mighty audience at the Sunrise Musical Theater Sunday night got more than a bargain. For only \$10, the concert featuring Monty Alexander, Stephane Grappelli and the Four Freshmen was a steal.

The concert was billed as a benefit for the Gold Coast Pops/Jazz Society, a fundraiser to help the group get off the ground. But the estimated 600-800 people who showed up looked lost in the 4,000-seat hall and the organization did not even make expenses.

But what a concert it was. Alexander, who opened, was as his very best as a soloist and using his quintet in a variety of configurations for over an hour. Everyone in the group was featured and everyone in the group was excellent. Of particular note was the playing of Othello Molineaux, who makes sheer magic with a pair of sticks and a steel drum.

When Alexander's group had been onstage for over an hour, and with two acts left to go, one might have thought the audience would begin to get restless. Instead, they refused to let Alexander leave the stage, standing and yelling for more until the group returned to play a jazz version of *Battle Hymn of the Republic* for an encore. It was that kind of night, a night for jazz purists who were into music and show biz be damned.

After a short intermission, Grappelli took the stage with his three

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sidemen — two guitarists and a bass player. Jazz violinists have come and gone over the past five decades, but there has still not been one to compare with Grappelli — either in technique or style.

The Frenchman played everything from Gershwin and Fats Waller to the Beatles, also featuring individually a trio of fine musicians. He even surprised the crowd by taking a mean turn at the piano. By the time he had finished, the crowd had been in the theater for over three hours. But again, they stood and demanded more. So Grappelli's group also did an encore.

The Four Freshmen changed the tone of things a bit. By the nature of what they do, their performance must be more structured and rehearsed, although not necessarily less creative.

The days of hit records and superstardom are gone for the Four Freshmen, although most of today's groups couldn't *hear* their harmonies, much less sing them. What's even more impressive is that the group accompanies itself, with every member doubling. One plays bass, trumpet and flugelhorn. Another plays keyboards, trumpet and trombone. The third plays drums and sax. Another plays bass and trombone. And in between all that they sing, in perfect tune, some incredible harmonies.

Each act was, in an of itself, worth the price of admission. The size of the crowd, however, indicates that we will not see the likes of this concert again at any price.

What a shame.