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Jazz great and legendary pianist, Monty Alexander, CD (right), accepts the 2012 Luminary Award from Jamaica's ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Stephen Vasciannie.

Four Jamaicans, the jazz great Monty Alexander and Third World lead singer William 'Bunny Rugs' Clarke among them, were honoured along with four other Caribbean nationals at the 19th annual Caribbean American Heritage Awards (CARAH) Gala in Washington, DC, for their extraordinary contributions in various fields of endeavour.

CARAH, an annual black-tie affair put on by the Washington-based Institute of Caribbean Studies, celebrates the contributions of Caribbean nationals in the United States of America.

And celebrate they did! Hundreds of Caribbean nationals and friends of the Caribbean were on hand at the Washington Capital Hilton hotel to recognise Caribbean achievement, service, and excellence. This year's special gala was also a salute to the 50th anniversary of Independence of two Caribbean nations - Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Music, dance and dinner warmed the body and soul in preparation for the awards ceremony, co-hosted, as in years past, by Washington DC's ABC affiliate WJLA TV news anchor Maureen Bunyan and Neiki Mohan of CBS Miami.

A sort of 'who's who' of political leaders, entertainment pioneers, business entrepreneurs and education innovators were at the Capital Hilton Hotel in Washington for the gala: Caribbean ambassadors headed by dean of the Caribbean diplomatic corps in Washington, DC, Guyana's ambassador Bayney Karran and Jamaica's ambassador to the United States Stephen Vasciannie and wife Lisa; ICS board chairman Ambassador Carl Masters; and ICS president and founder Dr Claire Nelson. Governor of the Bank of Jamaica, Brian Wynter was on hand, as was deputy director of public engagement at the White House, Heather Foster, who addressed the gala and was also specially honoured.

The internationally celebrated Alexander was presented with the 2012 Caribbean American Heritage Luminary Award, in recognition of his remarkable musical career spanning 50 years. Ambassador Stephen Vasciannie, in presenting the award, highlighted Alexander's career, which has produced 70 recorded albums to date, including collaborations with other music-industry icons the likes of Frank Sinatra, Dizzy Gillespie and Quincy Jones; and that his musical creations have had a unique, enduring appeal enjoyed by many generations.

In a sense, the best was saved for last: Indeed, last to take the stage was 'Bunny Rugs', whom Congresswoman Yvette Clarke presented with the 'Outstanding Contribution to Reggae Music' award as a member of Third World and as a solo artiste. The congresswoman, whose parents hail from Jamaica, joked that she and Bunny Rugs, who happen to share the same last name, may even be related. Rugs took the bait and ended the show with an energetic musical finale. With the entire ballroom on their feet, Rugs performed **Now That We've Found Love** and **Reggae Ambassador** all backed by DC's number-one backing group, the Image Band.

The other Jamaican honourees were president and chief executive officer (CEO) of the Information Technology Industry Council (ITIC), Dean Garfield; and editor-in-chief of **Essence** magazine Constance CR White. Garfield was honoured for his outstanding contribution to corporate America, and White, for excellence in journalism.

Other 2012 CARAH honourees included Trinidadians Anya Ayoung Chee, of **Project Runway** fame received the Vanguard award; soccer star Shaka Hislop received the award for excellence in sports; and Robert Greenidge, pan master with the Jimmy Buffett Band, received the Marcus Garvey Lifetime Award. Bahamian Andy Ingraham, CEO of the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators and Developers, received the Trailblazer Award.

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