

Arriving in Miami at the age of 17, Monty Alexander didn't have to pay too many dues. He went straight from playing piano behind a belly dancer to being a featured musician. Now, 20 years (and 35 albums later) he's one of the world's best jazz pianists, who has earned the title...



Staff photo by TIM RIVERS

Alexander the great

"I like keeping this tradition alive," Monty Alexander says of his need to put music before everything else in his life.

By Ray Recchi
Entertainment Writer

Monty Alexander is aware that there are many less-talented musicians making a lot more money than he does. He even laughs about it. "It can be tough," he said. "But it depends on your attitude, whether you can get up when you're knocked down.

"I love what I'm doing. But I'm realistic. I don't have any visions of grandeur. I love to make people happy. The sharing makes me happy. An audience, for me, is vital."

The ironic part of it is that Alexander is doing very well despite his apparent lack of interest in becoming a star. He is regarded by jazz fans as one of the top jazz pianists in the world. He has no booking agent, preferring to make his deals for himself. He has no manager to hype him. He has no wife to stand by him in hard times. But, then again, there haven't been too many hard times.

Arriving in Miami at the age of 17 from Jamaica 20 years ago, Alexander didn't have to pay too many dues. He

went straight from playing behind a belly dancer in a Miami club to being the featured pianist with the Art Mooney Band in Las Vegas when he was 18. From there he moved to Jilly's in New York. For the 18 years since, he has been on the road, constantly improving. He has recorded 35 albums for various companies, including RCA, MGM, Pablo and Concord.

"When most young musicians were paying their dues, I was in New York working with the best guys around," said Alexander during his engagement at Bubba's in Fort Lauderdale last week. "They'd say things like 'Hey kid, don't do that.' That was my training."

Although Alexander finished his engagement at Bubba's last night, he will be featured, along with violinist Stephanie Grappelli and the Four Freshmen tonight at 6:30 at the Sunrise Musical Theater in a benefit for the Gold Coast Pops.

A lot of musicians give lip service to putting their music above everything else. There are few like Alexander, however, who actually live it.

"I like keeping this tradition alive," he said. "It is just no nonsense making music. I have no booking agent. I've developed personal relationships with club owners and concert promoters. That's probably more unique than my playing."

"But I have the time to do that because I have no responsibilities, no wife or kids which are constantly diverting other people. I have time to think about things like where am I going to work in December.

"If I had a manager, maybe I would be on a higher level of popularity. But it's difficult to get management because I'm very, very particular. I'd rather treat myself right than have someone else treat me wrong."

The same goes for marriage. To have a wife would be to cheat on his music.

"Two or three times I came kind of close," said Alexander. "But something saved me each time. Seriously, though, there are certain of us who have a calling and we



Inside

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Art | 4 |
| Bridge | 5 |
| Stamps | 5 |
| Horoscope | 5 |
| Entertainment | 6 |
| Movie times | 10 |
| Books | 13 |
| Gardening | 14 |

Please turn to page 2G, column 1