

# Subtle interplay of calypso rhythms overwhelmed by poor sound system

Coconuts and Caribbean breezes were in the air Friday evening as the Montreal International Jazz Festival got under way.

Jamaican-born pianist Monty Alexander teamed up with West Indian steel drummer Othello Molineaux in the opening act of this year's Piano Plus series, and the result was an excursion into the tropical realms of jazz.

Alexander is one of the tastiest pianists in jazz — a musician whose exacting sense of rhythm and joyous melodies make him irresistible to the first-time listener.

Since emigrating to the United States at age 17, Alexander has played with Milt Jackson, Ernestine Anderson, Ray Brown, Dizzy Gillespie and many more, fashioning a celebrated recording career on the Concord label.

Pairing him with Molineaux — an inventive player who can spin off dizzying bebop lines on the steel drum — was an interesting move by festival organizers.

Unfortunately, the sound system at Théâtre Port Royal didn't do them justice. Molineaux's lines on the steel drum (an instrument from Trinidad

## REVIEW

**Monty Alexander and Othello Molineaux** at Théâtre Port Royal in Place des Arts Friday; **Bob Mover Quartet** at Salle Marie Gérin-Lajoie at UQAM Friday. Both part of the Montreal International Jazz Festival.

fashioned from an oil drum) are subtle and delicate, similar in timbre to the piano, but they were consistently overwhelmed in the sound mix.

The acoustics improved as the evening progressed, but it was difficult to appreciate fully the interplay between the two performers.

Still, one was able to marvel at Molineaux's jazz lines. He handled the tricky bebop number *Billie's Bounce* like it was a staple of the Caribbean diet. And when the two tackled the modal composition *So What?* by Miles Davis, Molineaux was equally at home.

Most of the program was flavored with calypso rhythms. And Alexander even took the microphone to deliver a couple of choruses of calypso vocals, in Jamaican argot.

The Alexander-Molineaux act was a tasty appetizer for the heavier fare served up later Friday by the Bob

Mover quartet. For some strange reason, this late-night series devoted to mainstream and avant-garde jazz has been booked into a sterile, concrete lecture hall.

The Mover quartet soldiered on regardless, even if they were almost 50 minutes late hitting the stage.

The wait was worth it, as the alto saxophonist lived up to his considerable reputation with a set of red-hot bebop.

Mover, along with Phil Woods, is one of the torch-bearers of the alto sax traditions established by Charlie Parker and Cannonball Adderley.

He's also a local favorite, having lived in Montreal for several years until recently returning to his native United States.

Mover was pushed to the limit by a backup trio of veterans that included pianist Walter Davis Jr., scholarly bassist Richard Davis and ebullient drummer Freddie Waits.

This was a celebration of bebop one of the great musical styles of jazz, delivered with conviction by four musicians who deeply understand the idiom. □

— Peter Hadeke