

Monty Alexander uses the influences on him to form style

By J. D. CONSIDINE

Influence is often an awesome thing to deal with. Sometimes, one musician will be so heavily influenced by another that his own personality will become lost; in other cases, there may be so many influences that what may seem to be an original style can actually turn out to be a pastiche of mannerisms so intricately woven

that it is nearly impossible to extract the individual sources from the mass.

Fortunately, there are rare cases of musicians who have taken their influences and formed them into an individualistic style, one which, rather than build off of these foundations, uses them as stylistic reference points. Such is the case of Monty Alexander, who opened a two-week stand

at the Maryland Inn in Annapolis Tuesday night.

Monty Alexander shows traces of Ahmad Jamal and (chiefly) Oscar Peterson in his playing, but these traces are developed in an intensely personal style. In fact, one can almost say that Monty Alexander is to Oscar Peterson what Clifford Brown was to Dizzy Gillespie; a true stylist, but one indebted to his forebearers.

Of course, Monty Alexander is one of those musicians whose playing takes virtuosity as a matter of course. His pianistic technique is breathtaking and one would be hard-pressed to think of an equal.

Unlike Peterson, whose playing seems to be rooted in Beethoven and Mozart, Alexander has an obvious knowledge of the impressionists. In one of his rhapsodic, floating introductions, a figure will appear that seems to have been lifted straight out of Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit," or perhaps Debussy's "Images." One realizes that it is not so much the phrase that bears the resemblance as it is the technical device; still, the effect is stunning.

One should not be misled by the classical allusions, however, because Monty Alexander is one of the most swinging, genuinely funky pianists in jazz. When playing a number that is particularly rhythm-oriented, like Sonny Rollins's "St. Thomas," or Nat Adderly's "Work Song," the emphasis is on the rhythm, the kinky funk of real get-down jazz.

This is where his technique really shows. Stacking the beat with incredible ostinato patterns, dropping accents in

front of, behind, beside, anywhere but on the beat, there is a constant, foot-tapping pulse to the piano. Great chunks of his Jamaican heritage float about in this rhythmic stew, but there are equal amounts of bebop and current pop.

Monty's melodic sense is keenly attuned to the rhythm, yet it is subtle enough to stand on its own. Perhaps due to his foundation in impressionistic piano literature, he doesn't play with the standard left-hand bass/right-hand treble orientation. In fact, it almost seems as if he has two right hands, and often the listener sits in stunned amazement at the complexly swinging results of his musical sense.

One should not forget the rhythm section, though, if only because Monty relies upon them so. On the other hand, with the excellent musicians he has to work with, he would be a fool not to.

John Clayton, the trio's bassist, is the perfect left hand for Monty Alexander. Hearing the two of them play together, one cannot help but recall the best of Bill Evans and Eddie Gomez. Although Clayton does not stay in thumb position as much as Gomez, he is by far a better rhythm player, and just as interesting a soloist. More impressive still, he is one of the few jazz bassists who can play well with the bow (no mean feat indeed).

Add to this the decidedly funky drumming of Frank Gant, who sounds like a cross between Grady Tate and Roy Haynes, and you have one of the tightest, most exciting trios in jazz today. It would be foolish to miss them.

—Under 20—

By TOM WILLIAMS

Does the following description fit you? "Students planning careers as chemists should enjoy studying science and mathematics and should like working with their hands building scientific apparatus and performing experiments. Perseverance and the ability to concentrate on detail and to work independently are essential. Other desirable assets include an inquisitive mind and imagination. Chemists also should have good eyesight and eye-hand coordination."

If the description fits, you may be interested in exploring chemistry as a career. The clothes we wear, the foods we eat, the houses in which we live—in fact, most things that help make our lives better, from medical care to a cleaner environment—result in part from the work done by chemists.

Chemists search for and put into practical use new knowledge about substances. They develop new compounds such as rocket fuel; improve foods, and create

processes for treating clothing chemically against flammability, soil and wrinkles.

Nearly 174,000 persons worked as chemists in 1974; about 10 per cent were women and the number appears to be growing. Nearly three out of four work in private industry; almost one-half in the chemicals manufacturing industry. Most others work for companies manufacturing food, scientific instruments, petroleum, water and electrical equipment.

A bachelor's degree with a major in chemistry or a related discipline is sufficient for many beginning jobs as a chemist. However, graduate training is required for many research and college teaching positions.

General information on career opportunities and earnings for chemists is available from: American Chemical Society, 1155 16th street NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, and Manufacturing Chemists Association, Inc., 1825 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.