

Inspired jazz marks Afro-Arts concert

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WEST PALM BEACH — The Festival of Afro-Arts' jazz program at Gaines Park called to mind an album made in 1953 titled *The Greatest Jazz Concert Ever*.

Not that the event Sunday night ranked with the live concert in Toronto where the album was recorded. But the music was very good, and the circumstances were similar.

The Toronto concert was held on the night of the Rocky Marciano-Jersey Joe Walcott heavyweight championship, and the 2,500-seat Massey Hall was only a quarter full. The musicians eventually became known as giants of jazz — Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus and Max Roach. Powell was drunk, and Parker had forgotten his alto saxophone and had to borrow a plastic sax from a music store.

Despite these hindrances, the concert turned out to be a great event that Mingus recorded. The tapes later were made into an album that became legendary.

At Gaines Park, the musicians

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did not quite qualify as jazz giants, although one — pianist Monty Alexander — certainly is a star in both reputation and quality.

The audience for this heady list of performers was smaller than the one in Toronto. At the peak, it reached about 250, and had dwindled to less than 75 by the time Alexander's performance was over. And that segment of the concert was marred by amplification problems.

But like the Toronto concert, the musicians in this one were undaunted by the circumstances, and played with inspiration. They played real jazz — not the pop-jazz that has dominated the last couple of SunFests in downtown West Palm Beach.

The concert featured other musicians with exceptional talent — Othello Molineaux, an internationally known steel drummer; Pete Minger, a trumpet/fluegelhorn player who was a featured soloist for Count Basie for 10 years; saxophonist Spider Martin, who has

played with the best; Duffy Jackson, one of the country's great swing drummers; and Robert Thomas Jr., probably the country's finest percussionist, who played and recorded with Weather Report.

Monty Alexander's quartet got off to a slow start on an original of his, *Eleuthera*, because of equipment problems. For a time, the amplification on Bob Cranshaw's electric bass was so high that it drowned out the other instruments.

After that, the quartet took off on some spirited music-making. In *Broadway*, Thomas caught everyone's attention with lightning-fast work on the congas and hand cymbals. Jackson, barely warmed up, suddenly became a whirling dervish on the drums, inspiring Alexander to stretch out with fast runs.

In a Caribbean medley that followed, the quartet worked into a frenzy of rhythmic interplay and then Jackson, who always gives 1,000 percent, dived into a furious-fast, complex solo. Alexander hammered out some bass chords, then did a captivating bit of heavy bass and lyrical right-hand work.

In *The End of a Beautiful Friend-*

ship, Jackson and Thomas traded four-bar solos that were both ripping and subtle.

Jackson also is remarkably adept on the piano and string bass. He filled in on piano with the Minger/Martin quintet when the guitarist didn't show up, pounding some swinging blues chords in *Blue Monk*.

Minger played some of the best licks of any of his showings in the Palm Beaches, especially in *Misty*. He structured a piquant solo, mixing fast up-and-down chromatic bursts, legato balladeering, effective use of space and high-note squealing. Every note rang out with crystal clarity. Minger managed to play lyrically even at a racing tempo in *Cherokee*.

Martin also shone, building a solo with rising intensity in *There Is No Greater Love*. In Herbie Hancock's *Cantaloupe Island*, taken at a liting gallop, he unleashed a steady stream of undulating phrases, varying them with high-note figures while the rhythm section pulsed. Martin's son, Darryl, sat in and played an astonishing drum solo.