

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

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Monty Alexander — 'A piano player's piano player.'

Tom Rogers/Republic

## Jazz trio's show flows with energy

By Steve Hallock  
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The Boojum Tree saved the best for the last in its four-week spring jazz piano concert series. And that's putting it mildly.

Monty Alexander is a piano player's piano player. It seemed there was a musician seated everywhere I looked at Monday night's opening show. Many of them had been anticipating this particular concert since the date was announced.

The pianist and his two sidemen were getting standing ovations from some of the audience members at the end of a single song.

He brought his own sidemen for this show, both West Coast musicians who work with Alexander when he's on this end of the continent: Frank Severino on the drums and Robert Maize on the acoustic bass. This was a plus, because it was evident from the first set that the three musicians know each other's styles well.

Fluid. Tight and smooth.

Maize's fingers walked the bass strings with ease, pulling a few groans out now and then, humming beneath Alexander's chords and runs. Severino had a nice, soft touch, using a minimum of equipment — only two cymbals, besides the high hat, and just one side tom. His floor tom has a foot-tension pedal, which provided a unique tonal quality on Severino's solo work.

**MONTY ALEXANDER**  
Boojum Tree, today through  
Saturday, three sets nightly.

The trio shifted from a fast swing to slow lyricism on *Day in the Life of a Fool* with the ease of a finely tuned automatic transmission.

And Alexander so obviously enjoys his work. He shot the piano a quick grin when his fingers hit a chord he liked. When the sidemen took over, he stood up from the piano and watched them, applauding their moves. He shouted approval during mid-song.

The man was alive, whether it was boogie, blues, straight-ahead swing, or slow and moody. His fingers literally dashed over the keyboards on the faster material, and he used the pedals with the expertise of a classical pianist. He wears piano shoes, a friend suggested.

The repertoire was a varied one, including the theme from the motion picture *The Deer Hunter*, a slightly Latinish *Never Let Me Go*, a swinging *Just in Time*, a be-bop Oscar Pettiford piece titled *Trick-tism*, and a lyrical *Where is Love* from the musical *Oliver*.

It has been some time since I've closed a nightclub. Monday night, at the end of the third set, I wanted more.