



JAZZBEAT

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Monty Alexander is a Jamaican boy making good playing piano in the USA.

He is getting help along the Road to Success (where in truth he may already have arrived) from the people at Pacific Jazz who have just brought out his debut album. It is called "Alexander the Great" and contains eight tracks.

Alexander at 21 is a performer who plays the whole piano, as the saying goes. He sounds something like every jazz pianist you've ever heard but not entirely like any of them. The Art Tatum influence is readily discernible, as are also Hines characteristics, as well as the sound of Oscar Peterson. The main thing about Monty, however, is that he swings wonderfully well.

The liner notes for PJ86, written by the record company's president, Richard Bock, say Monty Alexander began playing the piano in Kingston at the age of four. He became a working musician in his teens, playing with Jamaican calypso and R&B groups. "I heard some jazz," the youth is quoted, "but it didn't make a great impression on me at first." But then he began listening to the records of some jazz pianists (Tatum, Peterson and Wynton Kelly), and during a visit to Florida he sat in with an American group. These citizens encouraged him to pursue a career in the States.

Bock recounts that he was in New York's Birdland listening to Les McCann's trio when a McCann fan suggested that they walk down the street to Jilly's to hear the young Jamaican, Monty Alexander. Bock and McCann were much impressed by what they heard. A recording contract with Pacific Jazz resulted.

Thereafter Alexander opened the new Playboy Key Club in Los Angeles and, when the time arrived, made his "Alexander the Great" album for Pacific Jazz. The time was between 1 and 4 a.m. at the Esquire Theater in Los Angeles, a live session where the enthusiasm of the audience often comes through strongly in the background.

For this date Alexander had Paul Humphrey on drums and Victor Gaskin, who also plays with the Jazz Crusaders, on bass. I liked all the tunes but preferred "John Brown's Body"

and "Blues for Jilly" with "Comin' Home Baby" next followed by "Autumn Leaves" and "I've Never Been in Love Before." I suppose everybody now plays "Comin' Home Baby" but I remember it most distinctly from Herbie Mann's recording with Ben Tucker, who wrote it, contributing the bass.

It seemed significant to me that two fine musicians who have heard Alexander used the word "exciting" to describe his playing. They are Quincy Jones, the composer-arranger and band leader; and Kai Winding, the trombonist.

Jones said, "Monty is exciting and dynamic and should be heard by every jazz enthusiast."

Winding added, "There's no doubt that Monty Alexander will be exciting audiences and record buyers for many years to come."

McCann, a musician mentioned earlier who also records for Pacific Jazz, had this to say about the Jamaican: "I found myself totally overwhelmed by his energy, fire, joy and his great contact with his audience."

The word is just in that the Corpus Christi Jazz Festival this year will be held on July 18 (Sunday). This is one of the really fine shows of its kind in Texas and has been growing apace with the years. I don't know whether it is going to be held again in the Corpus Christi Coliseum; in fact, the only detail I have so far is that an 18-piece band has started rehearsing for its part in the festival.

But be assured that the details will be passed on through this medium as quickly as they are received. Many of our friends have assured me that they are going to the festival this year for sure. If the show is anything like last year's, they won't regret it.

About a month ago a new bookstore opened in New York's Greenwich Village, serving champagne and sherry and fontina cheese to 300 invited authors, artists and assorted Bohemians. What was really different, though, was the inclusion of the Giuseppe Logan trio, a free form jazz group, to play while the guests shuffled over the premises. Jazz surely must be where you find it, free form or otherwise.