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MONTY ALEXANDER
LOVE YOU MADLY

LIVE AT BUBBA'S

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DOUBLE ALBUM

DXD

Digital eXtreme Definition

MONTY ALEXANDER



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THE ABILITY TO SWING

Dear Monty,

The title, "Love You Madly," says how I feel about your musical soul. To me, you are one of the top five modern jazz pianists ever to play the instrument. As director of jazz programming for Columbia University's Radio station, WKCR-FM, I was given your debut album, aptly titled *Alexander the Great*, in 1965. To me, it proved to be a perfect title. It was indicative of your prodigious talents in both performance and composition, as well as being prophetic of what was to come.

It is mind-boggling to me that you do not read music and that you never have! Your technique is astounding; you truly can play anything you want at any time in any moment! That's the sign of true genius and inspiration! Your music is full of passion, power and subtlety and your interpretations are moving and deeply felt. In addition, your compositions are memorable, from touching ballad melodies to joyous and funky syncopation. Most of all, you have kept that great tradition of modern jazz alive—the ability to swing!

I am so very pleased to present, for the first time, this wonderful, magical evening from 1982 at Bubba's Jazz Restaurant, brilliantly recorded by Mack Emerman of Criteria Studios. It is a perfect example of the very best of you in every area of your talents—performing, arranging, composing and topped off by ridiculous technique! As a delightful bonus, there are two tunes on this release that you have never recorded before: "Blues for Edith" and "Arthur's Theme" from the movie, *Arthur*. Another plus: the quartet was one of your best. Percussionist Robert Thomas Jr. is as excellent as they come; drummer Duffy Jackson swings hard and bassist Paul Berner supports it all with a rock-solid foundation and swing.

So, here is me, wishing you much love and happiness, which you richly deserve for all the millions of people you have given such deep enjoyment to in your long career.

Sincerely,
George Klabin
Resonance Records

MONTY ALEXANDER

FOR THE LOVE OF MONTY

by Zev Feldman

It's a great pleasure to present the first Resonance album by the great Monty Alexander, *Love You Madly: Live at Bubba's*. I've been an enormous fan of Monty's music and recordings for a long time and have known him since 1995, when I was working at PolyGram in New York.

I first became aware of Monty's music by way of my good friend, Greg Cassius (aka DJ Greg Caz). He worked at the Tower Records at 4th Street and Broadway in Greenwich Village and was playing a compilation called *Move to Groove: The Best of 1970s Jazz-Funk* on Verve over the sound system in the store. Greg had produced the compilation with another colleague of mine, Harry Weinger. I remember walking up to the mezzanine and hearing Monty's classic version of "Monticello" and being really taken away with the groove and energy. There was just something about Monty's music and playing; his charisma, energy and beauty spoke volumes to me. He took the music to such incredible heights. You can tell he plays for the people, as well as for himself. It's all about melody and good feelings.

I was excited when Monty's album *Yard Movement* on Island Jamaica Jazz, and his good friend, the legendary guitarist Ernest Ranglin's album *Below the Baseline*, came across my desk at PolyGram. As the marketing rep for jazz and classical, I was thrilled to promote both of these albums. Greg and his co-workers would play them all the time at Tower Records. They sold tons of them and they became hits at the store.

The first time I spoke with Monty was when he called me one day to introduce himself. I'll never forget the sound of his bright and cheery voice saying, "Zev, this is Monty Alexander calling! The gentlemen at Island gave me your number and told me I should reach out to you." Even in that one brief phone call I could feel this man's passion coming through.

Also had the great fortune of seeing Monty and Ernest perform together at S.O.B.'s. In the decades that have followed, I've spent a lot of time researching piano music and Monty has become one of the great kings for me. I've revisited many of his classic albums, and the MPS records alone are worth their weight in gold if you ask this record collector.



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This recording captured live at Bubba's in Fort Lauderdale is really important and documents an underrepresented chapter of Monty's recording output. It's Monty with a great band, and the recording has fantastic fidelity, as it was recorded by the legendary engineer Mack Emerman of Criteria Studios. They are incredibly strong performances, with high energy that epitomize Monty at his very best. It's very interesting that my boss, George Klabin, and I share musical tastes that are, more often than not, closely aligned. We both revere Bill Evans, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra and many other artists. It's definitely the case with Monty that our tastes align. George has had his own friendship with Monty since the mid-1960s, which makes this a very special project for both of us. Don't miss George's essay in this package in which he expresses his deeply felt admiration for Monty.

We've assembled some fantastic voices to discuss Monty and these recordings, including the words from my co-president and co-producer, George Klabin, I mentioned above. We were also very fortunate to get both a short piece from Monty expressing his gratitude for the gift of music and his happiness that he's been able to make others happy through music, and we had a chance to speak with the man himself as he looked back at his music and his career. Next, we have the main essay by writer/producer Willard Jenkins. Then each of Monty's colleagues on this recording, bassist Paul Berner, drummer Duffy Jackson and percussionist Robert Thomas, Jr., share their own fond memories of playing with Monty at Bubba's. Finally, we hear from Monty's contemporaries, starting with NEA Jazz Master pianist Kenny Barron, and a collection of other talented pianists: Benney Green, Christian Sands and Emmet Cohen.

As always, I want to thank George Klabin for making this release possible. I'm so thrilled and honored to have had the opportunity to work on such a beautiful package for an artist I'm truly a big fan of. It's been such a joy working with Monty and his wife and manager, Caterina Zapponi, on this project. Thanks again, Monty!

THE GIFT

Dear Friends,

Somebody up there likes me.

I really don't know any music; I have not attended any music school or jazz academy.

At an early age I had a few piano lessons which I discontinued as I disliked the experience and what was being told to me.

I don't read music and I never had believed or planned that I could have a career with music to earn a living.

Away from only observing others from a distance, my ability to play music on the piano is something I can only call a GIFT given by a benevolent Spirit. To this day I don't understand it. I am grateful for it.

I feel this gift is a spiritual experience combined with my mind harnessing the ideas coming from various sources. My biggest objective and challenge is getting out of my own way. I give my gratitude to the great Giver of gifts because even now, after having had pancreatic cancer and 2 strokes, I am still able to receive the gift of inspiration and play my musical stories in a joyful way.

I have discovered that this Gift has also been something good for others; others have said they have received enjoyment and upliftment and most meaningfully: healing.

*Thank you sincerely,
Monty Alexander, C.D., D.Litt
New York City, June 2020*

"Bubba's was a music venue in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida in the late '70s and '80s. It provided a warm and comfortable atmosphere that was conducive to performing: good piano, acoustics, sound system and also importantly a courteous manager, Bob Shelly.

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THE CONSUMMATE ALEXANDER ARTISTRY

by Willard Jenkins

Monty Alexander is a pianist-composer-bandleader whose expansive range—from swing & soul to reggae & roots’ riddims—has not only yielded a rich career hallmarked by numerous brushes and engagements with giants of the jazz artform, but has also been substantive to the point of an entire festival that at its core is dedicated to his piano artistry. Held in Easton, Maryland each September, the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival not only celebrates the depth of Monty’s artistry, but also the heft of his Rolodex judging from the young artists and veteran Alexander intimates who annually play the stages of the historic Avalon Theatre in Talbot County, hard by the Chesapeake Bay.

The proud Jamaican native—born in Kingston don’tcha know—emerged on the jazz scene in the early ‘60s, after his family relocated to Miami, where he got his start toiling in the city’s piano bars. His break arrived after his fortunate encounter with Frank Sinatra and his buddy Jilly Rizzo, there on another mission, presciently followed a recommendation to check out the young cat playing piano in the bar. The Chairman and Rizzo were so properly impressed that they quickly installed him as house pianist at Rizzo’s storied hang spot Jilly’s in midtown Manhattan.

That exposure led to friendships and musical alliances with such jazz masters as pianist Ray Brown, the signature vibraphonist Milt Jackson, and later with such masters as Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Golson and a host of others, including

singers like Tony Bennett, Ernestine Anderson, and Mary Stallings. Later came affiliations with a range of younger song stylists such as Natalie Cole and Phyllis Hyman. Of his lengthy tenure in Monty’s rhythm section, bassist John Clayton says, “To play with Monty Alexander is a bass player’s dream. He consistently supplies level-ten energy, encourages you, laughs with you and has an uncanny ability to harmonize your bass lines, as if he senses what you’re going to play a split second before you’ve created it.”

Monty’s artistic palette has most assuredly included all manner of Jamaica proud alliances from ska and reggae perspectives, including with such chiefs as guitarist Ernest Ranglin, and other Yard rulers like drummer Sly Dunbar and his producing partner bassist Robbie Shakespeare. More than a few of those alliances have yielded Monty’s ongoing series of Jamaica-cum-jazz recordings,

including explorations of the Bob Marley songbook. Monty’s island pride has also included explorations achieving simpatico with the unique textural properties of Trinidad’s steel pan tradition, including affiliations with pan masters Othello Molineaux, and Len “Boogsie” Sharp.

One of Monty’s more recent live performance releases was the memorable, Grammy-nominated album *Harlem-Kingston Express* for the Motema label, captured live principally at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola, with additional field recording in

Jamaica, Germany, France, and Holland. The success of that recording yielded a Vol. 2 (Motema), which was Soul Train Award-nominated (certainly a rarity for a jazz artist!) and captured in a combination of studio and live performances.

For the sumptuous quartet date represented here, we find Monty working in a



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© Brian McMillen

largely straight-ahead atmosphere, with drummer (and Count Basie alum) Duffy Jackson ("a fiery and dynamic drummer"), bassist Paul Berner ("a marvelous supportive bassist," who has resided in the Netherlands since '91, and percussionist Robert Thomas, Jr., a Weather Report and Zawinul Syndicate alum who is one of the pianist's most enduring bandmates and "a magical hand drummer who added much spice to the overall recipe," says the pianist. "This combination would consistently fire on all cylinders with consistent musical fulfillment and a lot of enjoyment among the group and the audience," according to Alexander's recollection of those times.

For any jazz club, yielding a successful live recording is not only a test of the artists and the sound crew, it's also a testament to the joint's overall atmosphere: the physical space, the amenities, and the audience itself. Each of these factors add up to achieving—or not . . . proper *ambiance*. Bubba's obviously had that elusive *it* factor, at least judging from its previous yield, including successful recordings by Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Carmen McRae, Ahmad Jamal, and a Harry Sweets Edison/Sonny Stitt/Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis all-star combo pack. Such was apparently the club's cachet in that department that they actually fostered a live recording unit called simply Bubba's Live Recordings, Inc.

The most noted of these live-at-Bubba's recordings is the Art Blakey date, which was captured in October 1980 and was Wynton Marsalis's first recording as a Messenger. Clearly it was a momentous time for the band as Wynton's dad Ellis flew over for the week stand and sat in with the band, recalled the band's alto saxophonist at the time, Bobby Watson. According to the University of Miami grad Watson, "The ambiance at Bubba's was cool, a typical south Florida establishment."

Active in the 1970s and '80s, Bubba's Jazz Restaurant was located at 429 S. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd. in the heart of the community's tourism district. The Blakey date, simply titled "Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, recorded live at Bubba's" reportedly marked the club's coming of age. "Bubba's was a comfortable and ideal environment for the musicians and the patrons. They served good food, gave great service, had an excellent piano and the sound and stage requirements were up to par," was Monty's assessment now 38 years

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since this date was recorded. "Artists such as Art Blakey, Stan Getz, Sonny Stitt, Ahmad Jamal and others recorded there regularly—and so did yours truly."

For this date at Bubba's, Monty Alexander drew up neatly balanced set lists that touched upon several facets of his expansive bag, including standards, ballads, blues, island perspectives and southern exposures ranging as far south as Brazil. With its commanding piano intro, the opening "Arthur's Theme" is a piece whose chord structure hints at the Charles Fox-penned Roberta Flack hit "Killing Me Softly." The band achieves a seamless double-time closing, rhythm section in lock-step with Monty.

Ellingtonia is also on the bill, courtesy of "Love You Madly," whose easy tempo finds Alexander and co. absolutely inhabiting Duke, with Duffy Jackson skillfully employing his brushes in service to the swinging elegance of the tune, aptly illustrating the clever twists and turns of this consummate master. Monty—and Jackson's sensitive brushes—provide a textbook example of how to supportively accompany Berner's bass solo.

The Brazilian masterpiece "Samba De Orfeo," which was guitarist Luiz Bonfá's contribution to the classic film, *Black Orpheus*, is taken at a brisk, happy tempo highlighted by Robert Thomas's swift-wristed, adroit hand drum solo. Meanwhile Monty's following original "Sweet Lady," starts this life in ballad tempo, Monty inevitably raising the heat subtly as the performance ensues.

One of the true high points of the Monty Alexander songbook would have to be the lovely line "Eleuthra," taken here at a medium up-tempo to which Jackson adds a nice, agreeable hit of funk in his accompaniment of Alexander's solo. "Reggae Later," subsequently and cheekily known as "Regulator," is yet further illustration that no other jazzman has successfully owned and incorporated reggae 'riddims or pathos quite like Jamaica's #1 jazz son. Included amongst its charms is Berner's lush bass solo and the sweet hands of Robert Thomas. And no Monty. We simply can't wait until "later." With this groove, let's reggae *now!*

Disc 2 opens with the blues up and down, courtesy of "Blues for Edith," who must have been an exceedingly hip presence at least at the time of this inspiration, based on the soulful atmosphere of this tune! Then it's back to the islands, mon, courtesy of Blue Mitchell's enduring line "Fungii Mama."

Monty's lovely ballad, "Consider," offers an opening piano/bass duet,

contrasted nicely with the following Richard Evans tune, "Montevideo," with its crisp, quicksilver tempo, featuring Jackson's taut drum solo. The timeless Johnny Green chestnut, "Body and Soul," is given a beautifully relaxed and soulful essay, including Monty piloting the wayback machine to mischievously quote "When the Red, Red Robin Comes Bob-Bob-Bobbin' Along."

Befitting its title, "Swamp Fire" kicks off with a palpable sense of urgency. The apt closer, "SKJ," a line Monty's late playing partner, the signature vibraphonist Milt Jackson, wrote for his wife Sandra. The tune proves to be an apt celebration of Bags; certainly he would have appreciated this tempo!

Live recording can be a dicey prospect. What if the best laid plans of mice and men and maximum venue ambiance still result in a subpar performance? Such is certainly not the case here as Monty Alexander's artistry and the simpatico of his band, tune selection and the sheer vibe of the setting in this case truly captured lighting in the proverbial bottle. Part of the beauty of capturing Monty Alexander live at Bubba's on this precipitous August 6, 1982 date was that this resulting two-disc package provides a wonderful survey of the leader's gifts and his enormous rhythmic palette on the wings of his consummate piano artistry.

Willard Jenkins is an independent arts consultant, concerts and festivals artistic director/curator, producer, writer and editor under his Open Sky banner.

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© Brigitte Charvolin

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INFECTIOUS JOY: MONTY ALEXANDER SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN

Zev Feldman: *How did you start playing piano? What drew you to jazz?*

Monty Alexander: When I was a kid, my mother got an old piano; she wanted a way to enjoy herself, just to pick out tunes. So there was this piano in the living room. Kid Monty, at three, playing little tunes and rhythms and just banging away and having fun. The piano was a toy. It was like my buddy, my friend, an extension of me and I'd have fun with it.

Jazz? I just liked all music, name it. All. I'd hear a nursery rhyme; I'd go to the piano and play it. I'd play the Jamaican calypso sounds I heard or I'd hear music they would dance to in the living rooms. Our favorite was Nat King Cole singing those beautiful ballads and I learned to play those on the piano; the chords and the whole works.

One day I heard Louis Armstrong and he became a hero. I wanted to play the trumpet and just imitate Satchmo. And slowly but surely it ended up where I not only made up songs on the piano, but this language that when you play certain phrases, you're tapping into this thing where you're telling a story.

ZF: *Who influenced you?*

MA: Some of my parents' friends would have little parties. They'd sit around drinking and laughing, having fun. A lot of people had a piano. Then the husband of the family, he'd play the piano. I'd be watching. It was a kind of stride piano usually, with people standing around the piano singing those songs—the old calypsos, the popular songs of the day. I remember that from a very early age.

Then as I got older, I started hearing some local piano players. But not only piano; I liked the guys playing clarinet and there was a guy who played a saxophone he made out of bamboo. They called him Sugar Belly.

So all musical instruments being played with that sense of, "Hey, this is it: This is what I do and people respond." That evolved into listening to jazz records. Of course, Armstrong and Nat Cole, but other people too. Eddie Heywood had some hip records back in the early '50s, but Bill Doggett, a Hammond organ player who would tap the beat so that people would get up and dance. He was an early



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forerunner to reggae. It made you move, man. It wasn't just like, "Oh, this is a recital." No, it was full of spirit and smiles.

ZF: You moved to Miami at 17. Did you play much there?

MA: There were hotels on Miami Beach with little combos. I'd go from hotel to hotel. I'd see a guy playing the piano. Next thing you know, I'd get friendly with the musicians and they'd say, "Hey, kid, come on. Play a tune." And I'm playing just like I was one of those guys. I had this ability to pick up stuff and little by little I'm meeting guys who'd like to have me play with them.

I'm Jamaican. We have a different outlook on race because a lot of people are multiethnic and I was very comfortable everywhere. I would be probably more over in Overtown, which was the African American side of things. And when those guys played, it came from a grit in the music that, man, if you didn't tap your foot or shake your booty, something was wrong with you. Miami was a real center. You heard music when it was rich and soulful. And one day I was jamming in some club and a booking agent saw me and said, "Hey, kid. Come talk to me. I can get you gigs around Miami."

That's how I started getting jobs and then I'm playing in all these little bars and clubs. Miami was good for me and the people were really great to me—Black or white. To me it was just one beautiful world. But I identified more with the grit that that part of Miami that was, we used to say, soul. I got to the soul of it from the get-go, which was an extension of Kingston, Jamaica.

ZF: I remember hearing Count Basie records from the Americana Hotel in Miami. Did you ever go there?

MA: That taps right into a deep part of my story. I was "discovered" by certain music business people who weren't jazz people. They just saw an entertainer playing the piano and they started thinking about getting me on the Ed Sullivan Show. Great, but I needed to get my visa in order stay in America.

One of the ways to get your visa in order was if influential people wrote sponsorship letters to Immigration saying, "This young man is talented and he should be allowed to stay in America because of his talent." Four people signed letters for me. One was Count Basie because my mother went to the Americana and told him about me. And Basie wrote a letter to U.S. Immigration to allow me to stay in America.

The other three people? They came through my relationship with Steve Stark. Steve's father was one of the owners of the Cotton Club in Harlem. They all knew Duke Ellington and I met Duke in New York. I was young, a little unaware of the grand genius of that man, and I met him. I played for him and he wrote a letter for me to stay in the U.S. The third one was from none other than Frank Sinatra and the fourth was Eddie Fisher.

Around that time, I would be in Overtown and I'd hear music as I walked by one club or another. I always wanted to go and experience the music. One of the places there was the Harlem Square Club. That's where I saw Count Basie. Joe Williams was singing with the band. Sonny Payne was playing drums and Sonny played a hell of a drum solo on "Ol' Man River."

He threw the sticks up in the air and while they were in the air, he lit a cigarette, took a puff and grabbed the sticks before they came back down. I saw that and so jazz, showbiz, it was like one happy world. Entertain the people. Not to go up there and say, "I'm a great piano player." No, it's all about entertaining and having a good time. My experience with jazz in Miami was influenced by being around guys who were totally committed.

ZF: When you play for an audience what's your goal?

MA: The first person I'm playing for is me—I'm playing for myself in such a way that it's a delight. I'm playing for the joy of Monty Alexander. Man, I'm loving this moment. I love it.

The guys on the bandstand—the bass player and drummer—I'm also playing for them and that morphs into them playing for me. It's as if to say, "We're enjoying this experience so much, and guess what? It's so infectious that the audience is picking up on it, too." I'm sure that's what Armstrong was doing. He's generating all that infectious joy, that joy that came from him and musicians like him.

If you have a trio, the audience is the fourth member. You're playing and then at that moment, somebody goes, "Yeah." And that yeah is like somebody grooving on what you're doing and that becomes almost like the drummer played a rim shot and you're, "Yeah." So the audience is a vital part.

ZF: What was Bubba's like in 1982?

MA: The owner, Bob Shelly, liked jazz. There were clubs like Bubba's around

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the country: London House in Chicago where I played in early '70s, and Baker's Keyboard Lounge in Detroit. These clubs were there because somebody there was a fan of the music, rather than just having rock and roll.

Bubba's had good food. Not super-upscale, but a nice restaurant, service, table cloth, warm décor, cozy feeling. Stan Getz played there in those days. Art Blakey came. I remember Barney Kessel came. Quite a few people. Ahmad Jamal came. In fact, he recorded a live album there, *Ahmad Jamal Live at Bubba's*.

At Bubba's, Mack Emerman, who built and ran Criteria Studios used to come in. He dug my piano playing. I went with a friend of mine, Bill Ladley, a drummer, to the groundbreaking for Criteria. That's when I met Mack. Not long after that when Bee Gees came; they recorded all their hits there.

Mack said, "Hey, can I come and record you? I'll bring the remote truck." So he recorded the whole thing and, son of a gun, he gave me this tape as a gift. I'm very happy it's a Resonance document now because it reflects on a happy time of my life—my life itself and the musicians I was with.

When I performed, I was taking the paint off of the walls. Burning the joint down with swinging and joy and uplift. This recording has some of that. The piano was in tune, Duffy was playing in a way that excited you. Bobby Thomas—when he played bongos and congas, you never saw anything so fast in your life. All you see is a blur. Bobby ended up with Weather Report. And then there's Paul Berner, who laid down a solid rhythm; he just laid it down. I was in fulfillment with them, total fulfillment.

ZF: What was the jazz scene like in Fort Lauderdale in the 1980s?

MA: There were two motels there where Ira Sullivan played. He's a brilliant musician; he plays both trumpet and saxophone. He's larger than life, a beautiful guy who stays true to his art form. He never sought the big time. When he came to Miami, little by little he started playing around town. He's the one who rebirthed jazz in Miami. A bunch of guys came down to Miami from Chicago because of him. Jaco was from Florida. He got his start playing with Ira.

Those motels in Fort Lauderdale were the Apache and the Rancher. Ira would have sessions there and musicians would come to see and hear music. There was also a place called the Hampton House. That's where I went to see

Cannonball. He came with Yusef Lateef. Joe Zawinul was playing piano, Louis Hays and Sam Jones. All these guys became my friends. I'm hanging out with top of the game. I took Sam Jones to see Mohammed Ali and Oscar Bonavena. That's how tight we got.

Ramsey Lewis came. Junior Mance with Bob Cranshaw and Micky Roker came to the Hampton House accompanying Joe Williams. The jazz scene there was an African-American scene and I'm enjoying it. It's the time of my life. I get on the bus, leave home and go over there to see these guys who were kind to me. "Hey, man. What's happening? This West Indian, Jamaican cat. Man, what's happening?" And I was right in there with those guys and when I got to New York I had those phone numbers and I called Bob Cranshaw and I called up Sam Jones and I had camaraderie.

ZF: Any final thoughts about this 1982 recording coming out now?

MA: There was a period in the early '70s, mid-'70s, early '80s is where every time I put my hands on the piano, it was magic. I don't understand how, but I was in the zone. Then when I hear back some of these recordings from Bubba's, well, it was like, "What? How come? What's that? That's like magic."

This musical thing. You can't label it. You can't analyze it, it's just wonderful that I'm playing and I've got these three guys with me. Beautiful. That was how a lot of my performances through those years were. Bubba's was great place. When you played, the people were really sitting there enthralled. There was an attitude there where people listened instead of blabbing. Bubba's was perfect. It was relaxed. Bubba's was ideal.

Zev Feldman interviewed Monty Alexander on July 14, 2020

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EVERY NIGHT WAS A PARTY: PAUL BERNER ON MONTY ALEXANDER

Zev Feldman: *How did you hook up with Monty Alexander?*

Paul Berner: I was working with Lionel Hampton in New York. Reggie Johnson, who'd worked with Monty, called me and said Monty needed a bass player and he gave him my name. I didn't know Monty then. The next night I was in Bradley's and by coincidence sitting at the end of the bar, just listening, was Monty.

I told him Reggie told me he needed a bass player. He had a boxing magazine and he wrote my number in the margin of the magazine. He called a couple of days later. I went to his apartment and we played. We clicked right away. He was putting together a trio for a tour of small chamber music venues for Columbia artists, a classical booking agency. That was my first gig with him.

Emily Remler was on the tour. We were in a camper van. We didn't sleep in it, we just traveled in it. The only rehearsal before the first gig in Ohio was right before the gig—in the camper van. We talked everything through. I had an electric bass. I didn't take my big bass out in the van.

The tour was eight weeks with maybe one night a week off. Just one town to the next. But a great way to get played in, to work out.

ZF: *You moved to Amsterdam in 1990.*

PB: Quality-of-life. I'm not from New York. My wife is Dutch. By the time we moved, I'd done most of things I wanted to do in New York. We asked ourselves, "Where do we want to be in 10, 20 years? I wanted three things: a house where I can go into a room, shut the door and just think, a place with an audience to play for and a place with good musicians to play with. I found that in Holland.

ZF: *Monty played a lot with Ray Brown. Were you influenced by Ray?*

PB: Ray Brown is a great bass player but I was more influenced by Paul Chambers. I listened to Paul Chambers a lot, learned a lot of his lines, his way of playing solos. I loved Ray Brown every time I heard him; completely great, I just wasn't that influenced by him.



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ZF: Tell us about this performance at Bubba's.

PB: Every night was a party. Every night was completely on. On this gig, that band came together. We played the whole week there. It was effortless. Hearing the recordings back, it confirms it for me. It was flowing. There was nothing between us and the music.

ZF: Tell me about the guys in the band.

PB: Duffy's amazingly talented. He's like Monty. Whatever comes into his head comes out his hands. Really super talent. Duffy was an unstoppable character on and off the stage. Musically, it was effortless working with him.

ZF: How about Bobby Thomas?

PB: I always felt close to Bobby. I worked with him in almost every different combination: guitar, bass, drums like with Emily Remler, and other combinations. Bobby could be in any setting and fit in perfectly. There's only one guy who plays the bongos, congas, hand drums as he calls them, like he does. He's not a percussionist. He's a one-off. He's got a different view on music and it works great with Monty. He's a fabulous musician; totally, totally unique.

ZF: How was it listening to this music 40 years later?

PB: It was a surprise. You forget. You move on. You're doing other things. It's almost 40 years ago. The thing that struck me? The tunes. As I'm going through the recording, I think, "Oh yeah, that one. Oh yeah, with those changes." And so someplace back in the memory banks, the tunes are still there. But when I saw the titles, I didn't remember any of them. I don't know if I ever knew them. In the soundchecks every night, Monty would teach you a tune; at each gig, you'd learn a tune. He'd say, "I think I changed the bridge on this one," so you just learn it. And now is maybe the first time I knew the titles. That was a humorous thing listening back.

What really pleased me was just how on the band was. It was cracking, popping. You look back and you think, that band was good. But when you hear it back, boy, it jumps out of the speakers at you. My wife, who's also a musician, was sitting in the room next door. And she says, "Hey! What's that?" It just jumped through the walls.

ZF: Final thoughts?

PB: Every gig with Monty was big fun. When there might have been a little

tension, maybe we'd had a bad travel day, it was a great release to be playing. Whatever else was happening, when the band would hit, that was the only thing that existed. Monty brings such concentration to his playing, that I think the audience feels it. The audience gets picked up and carried on the trip along with us.

Zeve Feldman interviewed Paul Berner on July 29, 2020

MONTY ALEXANDER

A CONVERSATION WITH DUFFY JACKSON

Zev Feldman: When did you first meet Monty?

Duffy Jackson: In Miami, February, 1971, at a club, the Place for Steaks. Monty was playing with his trio: Eugene Wright on bass from the Brubeck Quartet and Dave Nuby, a swinging local drummer. I was there eating a steak dinner and all of a sudden, I heard this groove! I got up from dinner—and it takes a lot to get me up from food—and went into the lounge. I was jumping up and down and clapping and scatting and grooving because Monty was really swinging very hard.

There was a pianist playing opposite Monty. I approached him and said, "Can I play a song with you so Monty can hear me?" After Monty's set, this guy was terrified to play, but I talked him into going up and really wailing. Instead of doing a 40-minute set we played over an hour. I played the whole set because we were really swinging. That's how Monty met me and invited me to sit in with him on the next set. It was a five-star jam. We swung so hard, we were laughing while we played because it was just grooving.

Eugene Wright was the swingiest bass player. He had that blues groove from Chicago. It was a meeting of the hearts musically. I was a high school senior at the time. I had Easter vacation coming up and Monty invited me to play with him at Baker's Keyboard Lounge in Detroit, so during my vacation, I played two weeks with him at Baker's Keyboard Lounge.

ZF: What was Monty like as a bandleader?

DJ: When I was 17, Monty gave me a golden opportunity to learn to accompany the artistry of a true maestro. When tough love was needed, he knew what to do, but he was a loving big brother, musically speaking. He inspired me to treat the music with respect and he was patient with me because I was a young little dude just out of high school.

He took me right out of Miami Beach High School. Two days after graduation, I was playing at Shelly's Manne-Hole in Hollywood with Ray Brown, Milt Jackson, Teddy Edwards and Monty. And that was my graduation present: three weeks playing with them. Then I went to New York and we played at the Riverboat for the whole summer of '71. He had a 10-piece band. We played for dancing and it was really a great gig.



Monty taught musicians what he needed musically. He wanted you to treat the job seriously. I come from having fun on the gig, but I'm older now and I know you have to behave a certain way when you're working for somebody who takes his job seriously. Monty groomed me and taught me about respecting the bandstand and accompanying the artistry of the leader. He touched my heart that way.

ZF: Are there moments from this 1982 performance at Bubba's that stand out for you?

DJ: Monty was in the zone that night; really swinging. He played some of the greatest piano I've ever heard. Paul, Robert and I did our best to keep up with

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him. Fort Lauderdale in the '80s had an active jazz scene and the place was totally packed. People were digging the band really hard.

I love Monty's compositions and the way he plays ballads. The last tune on the album, "Monteideo," that's the fastest I ever played it with him. It was a workout, but it was a classic performance.

ZF: What was it like listening to this music again after nearly 40 years?

DJ: It brought back memories. In one way, I hear things I'd have done differently, but I've learned a lot since then. I started playing the drums at age four in 1957. My father was one of the most famous big-band bass players, Chubby Jackson. He played with Woody Herman and Charlie Barnet and had some of his own big bands too. And we were the only father-and-son bass and drum team for 45 years in the American swing music. I'm very proud of that.

My dad taught me about swinging and accompanying each soloist intelligently and with love. A lot of drummers go crazy behind horn soloists these days. I think you have to play time before you earn the right to party rhythmically; you have to take care of the store first.

ZF: Any final thoughts about Monty?

DJ: Monty has played with hundreds of great drummers through the years and I'm grateful he gave me a chance to play and learn from him. Monty's a teacher. He's enlightened a whole bunch of drummers like me. Monty has touched my life spiritually and musically. He's made me a better musician and leader.

Zev Feldman interviewed Duffy Jackson on August 5, 2020

THE GENIUS OF MONTY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT THOMAS, JR.

Zev Feldman: You grew up in Miami. How did you get into the jazz scene there?

Robert Thomas, Jr.: I was 19 when I started playing jazz. My first gig was at the Airliner Motel working with a piano player named Billy Marcus. One night, Monty came in and heard us. He'd never seen a bebop conga player and I must have made an impression. He came over and talked to me on the break. He asked me how old I was. I said 21. He said, "Well, I like you kid. I'd like to go on the road with you." And he came back the next year and took me out on the road. My whole life changed.



MONTY ALEXANDER



Photo by Brian McKeown

MONTY ALEXANDER



Photo by Brian McMillan

THE INFINITE FACETS OF THE BLUES: AN APPRECIATION

By Benny Green

In 1978 when I was fifteen, I heard Monty Alexander's album, *Montreux Alexander*—featuring John Clayton, Jr. and Jeff Hamilton—on the radio. Because the music was so dynamic and energetically exciting, I bought the record so that I could listen more often. At the time, I was just beginning to discover and explore the personal sounds and approaches of various Jazz pianists and I was quite struck by Monty's bright, warm sound and as well as by the highly infectious emotional breadth of his music.

Monty appeared at Keystone Korner in San Francisco with the Milt Jackson quartet later that same year and I got to hear and watch him in person for the first time. This was really something to behold; Monty was so vitally alert and, from the piano, he was engaged in the emotional expression of the band as a whole. His legs looked so lean and muscular and I remember marveling at how his right foot was steadily tapping, even on the brightest tempos. Monty at the piano was like a human love machine and I remember how blown-away I felt to take in his total musicality and pianism.

Once, many years later, I was staying at the same hotel as Monty and we had breakfast together. Monty asked me almost the identical question that John Clayton would ask me a few years later: "If you could play with anyone in the world, who would that be?"

On each occasion I told my elders that if I could play with anyone, it would be Ray Brown.

"I'm very happy to hear you say that, young man. Mr. Brown is golden and all of the young folks today are interested in that kind of music."

I've told Monty numerous times about occasions when I've been alone with a woman and wanted some music to relax our breathing and change the vibe in the room. I've told him more than once that I've played his rendition of the 1970s pop ballad, "Feelings." "Did it work?" followed by a knowing smile has typically been Monty's response.

Once I was in an airport with Monty and for some reason I had the blues that day. I'd said with a tone of resignation, "Sometimes, I feel that music is the only thing I really have," to which Monty responded, "GREAT! But don't say 'this is all I have,' say, 'I HAVE this!!!"

When Ray Brown died, the entire Jazz community was quieted. It was like we were all in shock to accept that he'd graduated the realm of our getting to be around him as we'd been. I telephoned Monty. His Jamaican culture had not "taught" him to mourn, but rather

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to celebrate. Monty once again gave me a powerful attitude adjustment and after speaking with him I felt empowered and inspired by the glory of Ray's life, rather than broken-down by wallowing in sorrow.

The soul and humanity that Monty breathes into each song he plays is a wonder. His depth of expressive soul and his nature of musical storytelling place him in his own league of piano-trio royalty, right alongside his inspirational heroes, Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson and Ahmad Jamal.

I'm thrilled by the inclusion of my very favorite (although rarely performed) Monty Alexander original in this set, "Sweet Lady," which was also recorded by Oscar Peterson—the ultimate respect. This waltz carries that kind of magical rejuvenation from the heart, soul, imagination and hands of Monty Alexander that makes a spiritual transference from this beautiful man to the listener.

Monty's embrace of the infinite facets of the blues is profound. His Jamaican sunshine is transformationally healing. His name is synonymous with musical enchantment.

MUSIC FROM THE SOUL

by Emmet Cohen

We all have select heroes who have left impressions on us throughout our formative years and those heroes often pepper our souls with inspiration and fodder for many years to come. When I was 13 years old, my father took me to see Monty Alexander at the Jazz Standard. It was a prime-time set, a packed house and the band was on fire! Mr. Alexander played from the depths of his spirit, emanating joy, positivity and hope, while connecting uniquely with every human being in that room. I was moved by his performance, by his improvisation, by his one-of-a-kind swing feel—I felt something I hadn't felt before and I wanted more!

Piano was a huge part of my life for years already but I'd just started my foray into the jazz world. A naive, fearless kid, I approached the master and asked, "When you improvise, do you use the Lydian mode, Mr. Alexander?"

The always personable yet stoic Monty Alexander looked me in the eyes and said, "Emmet, Mon, I have no idea what the Lydian mode is. I play from here," tapping his heart.

I revisit this moment often while improvising, collaborating, talking to others and teaching. Monty teaches us that music (and more specifically jazz) comes from the soul; it's learned through oral tradition and is a means to uplift anyone who will listen.

I admire Monty for his decades of beautiful recordings, his dedication to the greats who came before him and his ability to stay unadulteratedly true to who he is: Monty Alexander.

THE MUSICAL NORTH STAR

by Christian Sands

Sir Monty has done it once again, teaching all of us that when it comes to elegance, mastery and groove, Monty is King!

His arrangements and original compositions are always exciting and unpredictable, especially on this album, like one of my favorite originals, "Montevideo."

Listening to Monty is like eating a great meal made by a master chef. He cooks with the grits and gravy of the blues, adds the smokiness of NYC swing, all while simmering in the rich island flavors of his Jamaican roots. He satisfies all of the senses and leaves you wanting to hear more.

Monty and I met briefly on the Jazz Cruise some years back. I heard his group, the Harlem Kingston Express, just about every night and I was floored every time. The arrangements and the playing were incredible, but for me, what was most important was how Monty commanded the stage and how he kept the audience's attention. You could hear a pin drop when he played ballads. You could hear whoops and hollers as they grooved. Monty is a master entertainer. I've seen him many times since then and every time, he has always been so gracious to me as a young artist and pianist.

When I co-hosted two episodes of "Jazz in Film" on Turner Classic Movies, Monty called me. He simply wanted to say he was proud of the work I was doing. Our real relationship started there. After that, I interviewed him for my online series, "Welcome to the SandsBox," and in our conversations, I realized how similar we were aside from piano; how similar our core beliefs are and who we are as human beings. Monty is a true gentleman and I'm glad to call him a friend and musical North star for all of us to follow.





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MONTY ALEXANDER

1. **Arthur's Theme** (7:43)

(P. Allen, B. Bacharach, C. Cross, C. Sager) Begonia Melodies Inc.,
Warner-Barham Music LLC, Woolnough Music (BMI)

2. **Love You Madly** (8:06)

(D. Ellington) Sony ATV Harmony (ASCAP)

3. **Samba de Orfeu** (6:18)

(L. Bonfá, A. Maria) Meridian Editions (ASCAP)

4. **Sweet Lady** (5:47)

(M. Alexander) Monass Music (BMI)

5. **Eleuthra** (9:25)

(M. Alexander) Monass Music (BMI)

6. **Reggae Later** (7:43)

(M. Alexander) Monass Music (BMI)

7. **Blues For Edith** (6:38)

(M. Jackson) Recie Music (BMI)

8. **Fungii Mama** (10:30)

(R. Mitchell) EMI Unart Catalog Inc. (BMI)

9. **Consider** (6:00)

(M. Alexander) Monass Music (BMI)

10. **Montevideo** (6:57)

(R. Evans) Hema Music Corp.,
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp. (BMI)

11. **Body And Soul** (7:18)

(J. Green, E. Heyman, R. Sour) Druopetal Music (BMI)

12. **Swamp Fire** (3:54)

(H. Mooney) Universal Music Corporation (ASCAP)

13. **SKJ** (5:28)

(M. Jackson) Recie Music (BMI)



Monty Alexander piano

Paul Berner bass

Duffy Jackson drums

Robert Thomas Jr. percussion

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