

PERFORMANCE

Alexander charms audiences, colleagues

By Jack Dawson

Musicians who share a bandstand with Monty Alexander apparently have the same feeling as audiences about the jazz pianist. It's called chemistry, or even love.

"I've played with Monty for six years and I can tell you he's the same on and off the bandstand," said Robert Thomas, Jr., the brilliant 27-year-old percussionist who was formerly with the Weather Report fusion group. "He doesn't put me in a stereotype Latin situation, which I hate. He's the only one who lets me play bebop.

"He lets me be me."

Drummer Frank Severino, another Weather Report alumnus, has also been a close friend of the pianist for years, although this was only the second time they had played together. Bassist Brian Bromberg has only played with the group for six weeks but complements the others well.

Mr. Alexander, 38, a native of Kingston, Jamaica (he has been a naturalized American citizen for eight years), has been appearing at the King of France Tavern in the Maryland Inn, Annapolis, on and off for the past 12 years—almost as long as guitarist Charlie Byrd, who opened the jazz program there. Mr. Montgomery will appear there at 8 p.m. nightly through Sunday, with additional sets at 10:30 p.m. tomorrow and Saturday.

"They work at making it pleasant here," he said between sets last Saturday evening. "Paul Pearson [the owner] has been a real trouper about the music thing. There have been years he's lost money, but he knows the value of music from both a business and esthetic standpoint. That's what sets it apart."

There is always a variety of mood, tempo and rhythm in an Alexander set, be it at the King of France or on any of his 33 albums. He is a derivative pianist, so you'll hear snatches of Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson or Duke Ellington, as well as classical influ-

ences from the French romanticists and lyrical Latin composers.

His first set opened with a lilting version of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Once I Loved," a samba-styled favorite with both audience and musicians. That was followed by an up-tempo reading of the standard "No Greater Love," "Summer Song" from the movie "Summer of '42" (composed by Michel Legrand) and finally Milt Jackson's bluesy "S.K.G." After a short break they finished the set with "Stella by Starlight" (a classic ballad on which Mr. Alexander never sounds hackneyed), two Alexander compositions, "That's Why" and "Happy Lyso" (which is featured on his superb "Ivory and Steel" album) and drummer Severino's melodic "The River."

The bond among the players obviously begins and ends with Mr. Alexander, who is always involved, whether playing virtuosic chordal patterns, plucking the piano strings or simply snapping his fingers to the beat. He is a strong proponent of eye contact and occasionally flashes a smile of support when one of his colleagues has completed a particularly elegant statement.

"Playing fast and tricky to impress people is not enough," he said. "I believe people take to me because I enjoy the music so much. If I didn't enjoy it, I'd quit."

There is a new dimension in Mr. Alexander's life. He was married recently to jazz guitarist Emily Remler, who played at the One Step Down in Washington last weekend.

Zinman to lead BSO today and tomorrow

By Stephen Cera
Sun Music Critic

David Zinman, who begins a two-year appointment as principal guest conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra next fall, conducts the BSO at 8:15 p.m. today and

They met a year and a half ago when she answered an audition call for a road tour. Although Mr. Alexander is famous for his bandstand chemistry, this was obviously something new.

"I was kind of leery after all these years as a traveling musician," he said. "We were three guys on the road, but it turned out she was a great guitarist. She sounds a lot like Wes Montgomery."

He is particularly pleased that both have current albums on the Concord label—hers are "Firefly" and "Take Two," his are "Trio" and "Triple Treat," which he recorded with guitarist Herb Ellis and bassist Ray Brown.

"All of us are friends, and I think the albums reflect the old Nat (King) Cole trio," he said. The albums feature standards like "Body and Soul," "To Each His Own," Hoagy Carmichael's "Small Fry" and "You Call it Madness."

Although he has written a number of songs, Mr. Alexander said he does not consider himself a composer. "That is not my bread and butter. If it comes to me I deal with it, but I don't force it.

"The same is true if I hit something good [an improvisation] while I'm playing. The ideas come out of the air and if it feels good, I'll explore it. Sometimes I don't explore enough because I have to think of the group."

Despite his success, Mr. Alexander is not



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completely satisfied with his career, particularly the recording end.

"I have yet to make a record where there has been enough time to make something special out of it," he lamented. "People like Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett or other top artists have a certain leverage. They're their own bosses and it shows in their work."

"I'd like to do something that shows my playing at its best—not something gimmicky, but maybe a record with a symphony orchestra. I feel I should be producing something special before the world blows up."

He smiled at the thought and returned to the tavern for his closing set.

debut with the Berlin Philharmonic.

Mr. Zinman has made numerous recordings. His first—Chopin's F-minor Piano Concerto and Bach's D-minor Concerto with Vladimir Ashkenazy and the London Symphony for London Records—won the Grand Prix du Disque.