

Pianist plays tribute to influences

By Nate Guidry
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

It was "mystical accident" that brought pianist Monty Alexander to jazz.

"Growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, music was all around me," he said. "I started playing piano at 6, and before I knew it people were hanging around me."

Alexander and his quartet, which features guitarist Derek DiCenzo, bassist Hassan Shakur and drummer Troy Davis, open a four-day residency tonight at the Manchester Craftmen's Guild. The concert, sponsored by Duquesne Light Co., will focus on the music of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Bob Marley and will feature guest appearances by saxophonist Gary Bartz and Frank Wess.

"Each one of those guys had a profound influence on me," said Alexander, who first heard Cole during a performance at the Carib theater in Jamaica. "Until that time, I had been playing music that emphasized rocking the house, but Cole's music took me to a different place and provided me with a new kind of musical experience." But it was the music of Errol Garner and Art Tatum that ultimately steered him toward jazz.

After high school, he left Jamaica for Miami, where he began sitting in with local bands. Eventually he joined the local musicians union where he met and performed with



Monty Alexander found jazz in Jamaica.

friends of Cannonball Adderley.

In 1964, he met Jilly Rizzo and Sinatra while doing a tour of Los Vegas with Art Mooney's orchestra. Rizzo hired him to work at his club, "Jilly's," in New York, where he played with Sinatra, Harry "Sweets" Edison and others.

MUSIC PREVIEW

Monty Alexander Trio

Where: Manchester Craftmen's Guild, North Side.

When: 7:30 tonight; 8 p.m. tomorrow; 7 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday; 2:30 p.m. Sunday.

Tickets: \$22-\$25;
412-322-0800.

Tonight he gets the opportunity to present the music of some of his favorite artists.

"It gives me goosebumps just thinking about [them]," said Alexander. "The music we perform will be my personal reflections of each artist. They all touched me musically and spiritually very deeply."

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