

# 'Rocksteady' delivers pleasing fusion of sound

By **MIKE CURTIN**

*Special to The Post-Star*

**"Rocksteady" — Monty Alexander  
with Ernest Ranglin (Telarc)**

You can take the kid out of the country, but not the country out of the kid.

Such is the case with Jamaican pianist Monty Alexander, who despite the honors accorded him in the jazz world, remembers his early days as a linchpin of his nation's music industry.

Growing up in the hill town of St. Ann (also the birthplace of reggae great Bob Marley),

## REVIEW

Alexander led his own band and backed the island's musical royalty as the house pianist at Clement "Coxsone" Dodd's famed Studio One recording studio, before moving to the U.S. and working with pop and jazz icons like Frank Sinatra, Sonny Rollins and Dizzy Gillespie.

In recent years, his solo recordings have assumed a distinctly tropical air, especially on his latest disc, where he's reunited with old friend, guitarist Ernest Ranglin.

The pairing produces a series of musical "showdowns" that produce no casualties, save a few hits to Alexander's pride for the wacky c.d. cover.

Ranglin is no stranger to

Jamaican music, having brought his fleet, clipped style to hundreds of ska and reggae recordings, including Millie Small's "My Boy Lollipop," and Jimmy Cliff's "Live."

Together for the first time in 30 years, they snake through the indelible groove of the Skalelites' "Confucious," and deliciously meditate on Marley's masterful "Redemption Song."

For "Stalag 17," they effortlessly slip between major and minor modes.

On "Marcus Garvey," Burning Spear's hypnotic ode to one of the Rastafarian culture's major figures, they tweak the original's ruminative tempo while trading inventive leads.

On the Congo's "Row Fisherman," an insistent beat is laced with a gospel sheen.

When tackling Augustus Pablo's "East of the River Nile," they wisely defer to the song's moody texture and Spartan sound, and instead chip at the edges of this cornerstone of "dub."

Toots Hibbert joins the duo on his own "Pressure Drop," and enjoys a good-hearted romp on a song's he's done literally thousands of times.

While far from challenging as the more vaunted modes of jazz can be, "Rocksteady" is still a pleasing musical exercise from two international stars, who know that "fusion" can take many forms.