

Jamaican roots influence work

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By Chris Smith

MONTY Alexander lets loose the power when he sits at the piano for a solo performance.

The New York-based jazz musician did it twice yesterday as he performed two shows on Grey Cup day, a gutsy move in itself.

And while his Jamaican roots influence his work, such as on the Bob Marley composition, No Woman, No Cry, it was standard jazz tunes such as Lil' Darlin', from the Count Basie Orchestra book, that defined his afternoon performance.

Alexander opened the show with a frenetic, reconstructed Sweet Georgia Brown as if to prove that he was right to perform solo instead of in a trio with two local musicians, as originally planned for the **Asper Foundation Jazz Performances**.

His second number, For The Young At Heart, took the power level down a notch, but was no less a tour de force of technique and style.

His magnificent technique came into play most obviously on Johnny Mandel's Close Enough For Love.

The show wasn't all standards, however, and Alexander included his own work such as Sweet Lady, a waltz he wrote about 15 years ago. A trilogy "that signifies what people do when they have to dig down deep" - Trust, Renewal and Hope - was beautifully done and a real audience pleaser. The Hope section did, indeed, soar with hope.

For the second time in recent weeks, jazz musicians have performed Charlie Chaplin's work. Alexander performed Smiling Though Your Heart Is Breaking; Vancouver-based singer Denzal Sinclair also performed Chaplin during a performance with the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra at Pantages Playhouse Theatre, where Chaplin had performed on the vaudeville circuit.

Alexander sang on a couple of numbers, including one he introduced as "a song I heard growing up in Kingston, Jamaica" - Too Marvellous For Words.

"It's not Jamaican," he explained with a laugh, "but in my house we had all the popular songs."

It's always fun to watch the hands of a great pianist as they fly across the keys, as they did for a great deal of Alexander's material, or caress the sound out of the piano.

Alexander closed the performance by introducing his wife Katherina - "One of my favourite singers" - and doing a duet with her on an Italian song whose title translates to Summer.

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