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Monty Alexander Jazz Festival Lights Up Labor Day Weekend in Easton on Maryland's Eastern Shore

Easton, Maryland - On Labor Day Weekend 2011 the second annual Monty Alexander Jazz Festival brings legendary jazz pianist Monty Alexander to the historic Avalon Theatre in Easton. The two-day event offers performances by both seasoned and fast rising stars of national and international acclaim.

The town provides a picturesque and tranquil background for the jazz festival. Townies and tourists can stroll streets lined with art galleries and museums, antique shops, restaurants, and historic inns. Concerts take place at the Avalon Theatre, a beautifully restored art deco building offering cultural events year-round.

The festival kicks off on Friday, September 2 at 7:00 p.m. with passionate young trumpet star, Dominick Farinacci. "This kid is 360 degrees!" says Quincy Jones. When Farinacci was just 17, Wynton Marsalis heard him play in Cleveland, Ohio, and invited him to New York to perform on PBS. Farinacci was then invited to join the inaugural class of Julliard's jazz studies program. While in school, he toured Japan and had a hit record there. He has since garnered many prestigious honors, including the "International New Star Award," previously given to Diana Krall and Christian McBride. A New York City resident with a heavy touring schedule, he continues to promote the cause of jazz education in his hometown Cleveland.

Pianist Aaron Diehl is another young powerhouse and Marsalis protégé. He joins his Julliard classmate Farinacci for the September 2 duo performance. Winner of many jazz competitions, Diehl is known for his distinctive interpretations of the music of Scott Joplin, "Jelly Roll" Morton, Art Tatum and Duke Ellington. Diehl has performed with Hank Jones, Wycliffe Gordon, Benny Golson and numerous other masters. He has toured Europe, South America and Asia. At home in Manhattan, he directs the music program at St. Joseph of the Holy Family Church in Harlem.

Returning to the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival this year is 19-year-old alto sax phenomenon Grace Kelly. Her quintet is the second act on Friday night. Festival Artistic Director Monty Alexander says Kelly is "not an artist for jazz lovers only but

Chesapeake Chamber Music PO Box 461 Easton, Maryland 21601
one for the whole world." Since age 12, Kelly has released seven full-length albums and performed over 500 concerts as a leader. She has appeared at the Montreal Jazz Festival, Newport Jazz Festival, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Apollo Theater, Birdland and other major venues. She has played with generational masters such as Dave Brubeck and Phil Woods and young stars such as Esperanza Spalding. She is currently a senior at Boston's Berklee College of Music.

Tribute to Charlie Byrd

On Saturday, September 3 at 4:00 p.m., the festival pays tribute to Monty Alexander's longtime friend and collaborator, icon Charlie Byrd (1925-1999). Byrd thrilled American audiences with his jazz and classical guitar. His collaboration with Stan Getz in the 1960s helped ignite this country's enduring love affair with bossa nova and he shared his passion for gypsy jazz and other styles of Latin jazz.

The tribute concert features multi-talented jazz guitarist, composer, and producer Nate Najar, a native Floridian. Najar is grounded in classical music and has an affinity for jazz, Latin, blues, and gospel. This uncommonly expressive player uses a finger-style nylon string technique that is rare these days. He cites Jay Berliner, Earl Klugh and Gene Bertoncini as major influences along with his hero Byrd.

Najar will collaborate with accomplished vibraphonist and drummer Chuck Redd and Redd's ensemble. Redd joined the Charlie Byrd Trio in 1980 at the age of 21, launching an international performing and recording career. Since then he has been featured on more than 70 albums, has played with too many notables to list and has toured Europe and Japan many times. The *Washington Post* recently noted his "melodic sparkle," while *Jazz Times* called his vibes work "exquisite!"

Monty Alexander Quartet

At 8:00 p.m. the Monty Alexander Quartet takes the stage for what will surely be a show-stopping performance by this living master of jazz piano.

Born on D-Day (June 6, 1944) and raised in Kingston, Jamaica, the largely self-taught pianist discovered his musical vocation when he heard Louis Armstrong and Nat "King" Cole on tour in his hometown. Alexander's early career included recording sessions with Bob Marley's first band, the Skatalites - artists that would later transform reggae from a local folk music into an internationally beloved genre.

Moving to New York in the 1960s, Alexander landed the house pianist job at a club called Jilly's, where he accompanied Frank Sinatra and other touring stars of the day. There he met Modern Jazz Quartet vibraphonist Milt Jackson, who introduced

him to bebop legend Charlie Parker and brought him into the fraternity of jazz innovators.

In the past five decades, Alexander has played extensively around the globe as a leader and sideman, bridging the worlds of American jazz, popular song, and Jamaican music. He recorded a piano track for the score of "Bird," Clint Eastwood's

biopic of Charlie Parker. He has collaborated with vocalists such as Natalie Cole and Bobby McFerrin. In a recent recording, he returned to his musical roots by reinterpreting 12 Bob Marley compositions as jazz piano-centered arrangements.

The Monty Alexander Jazz Festival is presented by Jazz on the Chesapeake, a program of Chesapeake Chamber Music. The event is generously underwritten by Verizon, with additional support from numerous private sponsors.

Individual ticket prices vary from \$20 to \$75 depending on the chosen concerts and seating. Discounted packages for the entire Festival or just the Saturday events are also available. Prices are \$95 to \$150 for a Festival Pass, and \$60 to \$100 for a Saturday Pass. For tickets and information call 410-819-0380 or visit ChesapeakeChamberMusic.org/jazz. For general information about visiting Easton, see <http://www.tourtalbot.org/>.

