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Weekend



NIGHTLIFE: A SET OF SIX / 5

From flamenco to reggae, bluegrass to new wave, here are half a dozen high spots — including two with piano bars, one with a view and another with a view of you, and one place that's really three places.

Photo by Molly Roberts

SET SAIL FOR THE CARIBBEAN FROM OLD TOWN ALEXANDRIA

BY OLIVE HAGGANS MOO

Climb the stairs, step into the parlor and get as close as you'll ever get to Montego Bay without boarding a Jamaica-bound jet. Club Montego Bay is the brainchild of founder and owner Roy McPherson, who wanted to recreate the aura of his island home in Old Town Alexandria.

He succeeds. Club Montego Bay exudes Caribbean flair and charm. It's free-flowing and spacious, with bare wooden floors complementing the dining room's massive mahogany-ledged fire place. The high ceiling is offset by tall Victorian windows. Each of the club's four rooms is dotted with tables and chairs arranged to afford a good view of the stage. The rooms are dark and cozy; like the music, they entice the crowd to mingle.

"This is Ja Music!" bellows the lead singer of the reggae band Wadadah during a pause from the upbeat musical scores, which leave you swaying, and sharing "this ain't bad" smiles with the nearest dancers.

The band's musical arrangements are hypnotic, employing such instruments as the gourd and scraper, which makes a soft "karrap" sound, and maracas, which add a little "shoop, shoop" to the mix. "Karrap, Karrap, Shoop, Shoop / African people realize, we're still in bondage," goes the tune over and over again. The lyrics are heavy, the tunes light and pretty.

You could try to just sit back and sip rum punch (an Island favorite made with rum and flavored syrup).

But the music is seductive, calling everyone to dance. In a minute, the floor is crowded with all types of people — a white, sophisticated couple about 45 or 50; a black sophisticated couple about 25 or 30; a couple of punk rockers of no assessable age; a black, single man about 30; a Rasta couple, locks tucked away under tams (in spite of the sign at the entrance that reads: No tams, No bare feet); a Peruvian gent and his fan-fanning partner; a young black Floridian; a young white Bostonian, who, because of his admiration for the club, donated a lovely piece of art. In short, the crowd is integrated — racially, economically and socially.

The idea behind the club is to offer a little bit of the West Indies to takers here in the U.S. As McPherson points out, "There was no place around that featured reggae music, no place. So I decided to open this place up, because this music, this culture should be shared."

CLUB MONTEGO BAY — 715 King Street, Alexandria. Open

Wednesday through Sunday at 8. Wednesday, local rhythm 'n' blues and reggae band; Thursday and Friday, reggae band; Saturday and Sunday, recorded music. Cover is \$8 or \$4. 860-0799.