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## HERB ALPERT

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# THE ALPERT EFFECT

Legendary jazz trumpeter Herb Alpert and wife Lani Hall bring their buoyant sound to Arcadia.

BY BETTIJANE LEVINE



PHOTO: Louis Oberlander

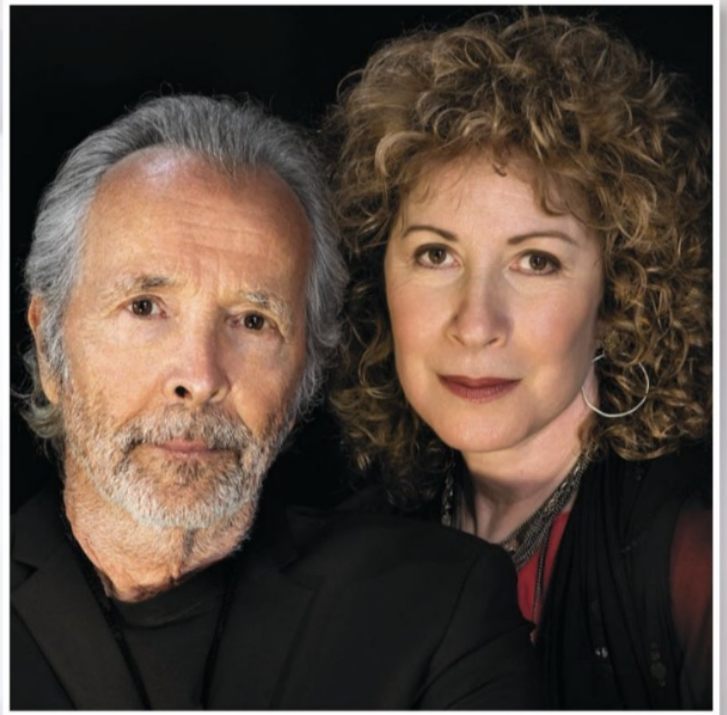
AN EVENING WITH HERB ALPERT AND HIS MUSIC ISN'T A RECOGNIZED MOOD-ELEVATING TECHNIQUE, BUT PERHAPS IT SHOULD BE. THE LEGENDARY TRUMPETER'S TOURS IN RECENT YEARS HAVE INSPIRED CRITICS TO COMMENT ON A PHENOMENON THAT MIGHT BE CALLED THE ALPERT EFFECT. IT'S AN EMOTIONAL UPLIFT THAT HAS TRANSFUSED SOLD-OUT AUDIENCES FROM JAPAN (WHERE HE PLAYED TWO MONTHS AGO) TO NEW JERSEY; IT'S A KIND OF EUPHORIA THAT, AS *THE NEW YORK TIMES* REPORTED WHEN ALPERT RECENTLY PLAYED NEW YORK'S CAFE CARLYLE, "WAFTS A SENSE OF EASYGOING OPTIMISM AND JOY" THROUGHOUT THE ROOM. ALPERT AND HIS VOCALIST WIFE, LANI HALL, WILL BRING THEIR TRANSPORTING RHYTHMS AND FRESH INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK TO THE ARCADIA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER ON FEBRUARY 20.

Alpert sounds exhilarated just talking about the start of the current tour and says their performances are organic, and therefore different every time. "We interact with the audience and each other," he said in a phone chat from his vacation home in Hawaii. He seems to have a sharp sense of what audiences will respond to. In one of his many diverse forays into the arts world, for example, Alpert has racked up producing credits for hit Broadway shows, including Tony Kushner's Tony-winning *Angels in America*, *Jelly's Last Jam*, Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass*, August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* and *The Boy from Oz*.

Indeed, at age 80, this man could have started slowing down decades ago, but instead, he seems to be revving up. Last year, Alpert and Hall played 40 concerts. This year they'll play 60. Why bother touring? Doesn't it wear you out? He laughed. "You're making assumptions," he said. "Actually, I get energy from it. After a concert I feel better for the experience. I've been playing trumpet since I was eight. I enjoy creating. We've been playing with the same group of extraordinarily talented musicians for the past 10 years, and the response [to our concerts] has been phenomenal. It's fun. And my wife is a world-class singer. She was the voice of Brasil '66 when they started."

We asked Alpert about their unusually therapeutic effect on audiences. "I think it's because our music takes people someplace different, on a kind of trip," he said. "Since the start of my career, when my first big hit, 'The Lonely Bull,' took off like a rocket, I've gotten that kind of response. I remember getting a letter from a woman

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in Germany who thanked me for taking her on a vicarious trip to Tijuana.” That was in the 1960s, when young Alpert’s Tijuana Brass recordings were so popular that, at one point, they outsold the Beatles by two to one; he also had the since-unmatched distinction of simultaneously having four albums in the top 10 and five in the top 20. And he’s the only artist ever to reach No. 1 on *Billboard’s* Hot 100 as both vocalist and instrumentalist.

Alpert’s distinctive trumpet tone and Latin-and-jazz–inflected stylings are now considered as classic and identifiable as Frank Sinatra’s vocals. Jazz great Miles Davis once told Alpert he could recognize his playing after just three notes. The humble trumpeter replied, “You hear just *one* note and you know it’s Miles.” Alpert has sold more than 72 million albums and won nine Grammys (the latest as recently as 2014, for *Steppin’ Out*). He’s in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and has been named one of the Grammy Museum’s Icons of the Music Industry. In 2013, Alpert received the National Medal of Arts from President Obama.

The musician also co-founded one of the most successful independent record labels in history. He’s the “A” of A&M records, which he started in his Fairfax District garage in 1962 with his friend Jerry Moss (the “M”). Together they released Alpert’s own chart-topping Tijuana Brass hits like “A Taste of Honey,” along with those of other artists they signed who weren’t yet the superstars they would soon become. On A&M’s roster were Carol King, Stan Getz, Quincy Jones, Joe Cocker, Cat Stevens, Sting, The Police, Sergio Mendes (for whom Lani Hall was lead singer), Peter Frampton, The Carpenters and dozens of others.

Alpert and Moss sold A&M in 1987 for \$500 million, plus a reported additional \$200 million negotiated later. But Alpert has never stopped playing, composing, recording or performing. His just-released album, *Come Fly With Me*, contains new compositions; and at this writing five of his albums were in the Top 20 at HDtracks.com, the high-definition digital music store.

Alpert has been likened to a kind of Renaissance Man, because of his many different interests and talents. In the philanthropy world, he’s something of a living legend. Through the Herb Alpert Foundation, he and his wife have reportedly donated about \$200 million to music and arts education programs across the country. (More on that later.) He’s also an accomplished artist and sculptor, whose work is exhibited in major galleries and museums (his huge bronze totems are currently on view at the Field Museum in Chicago and his abstract expressionist art is in MOCA’s permanent collection). Some of his 18-foot-tall totem sculptures dot the landscape of his six-acre homestead overlooking the Pacific in Malibu, and his colorful abstract expressionist





paintings dot the walls of the elegant Vibrato Grill & Jazz Restaurant he built at the top of Beverly Glen. The place is acoustically designed so musicians and audiences get the best sound from the jazz greats who frequent the club.

Alpert, who has been married to Hall for 41 years, seems determined to give back to America much of what it has given him. There are grade schools, university music schools and arts programs across the country that survive solely or in large part because of funding from the Alper's foundation. In 2007, the foundation's \$30 million gift to UCLA led to the establishment of the Herb Alpert School of Music, the University of California system's first independent music school, formally established in January by UC regents. After a \$23 million gift to California Institute of the Arts, the music school there was also named in his honor. For the past 21 years, the foundation has given five \$75,000 awards annually to risk-taking mid-career artists in music, dance and the visual arts to help them reach their potential. And when Alpert heard that the venerable Harlem School of the Arts might close due to financial trouble, his foundation swooped in and saved it with \$5 million in 2012, in what *Crain's New York Business* reported as a "Miracle on 141st Street." Other beneficiaries include P.S. Arts in Venice, California, and Boston; the California State Summer School for the Arts; the Thelonius Monk and the Brubeck Institutes for Jazz; and educational broadcasting and public television, to name just a few.

Alpert is passionate about it all. "I was fortunate. When I was eight years old I had this music appreciation class in my grammar school and I was able to pick up this trumpet that was sitting on a table along with lots of other instruments for kids to choose from. That trumpet got me started, and because of it, I've had this unusual and blessed life. I think there are lots of kids out there with talent who don't have that opportunity, because the first thing they carve out of the public school system, and even some private schools, is the arts programs. I think the arts should be a core subject in all schools. Give kids an opportunity to explore their own uniqueness and their own talents. An arts education spills over to benefit the academics. It's a win-win situation."

And for those attending his concert in Arcadia, he says, "We'll do all the greats, but in a way they haven't quite been done before. It will take them someplace they haven't been." A happy place, say the critics, and that in itself is a gift. ||||

Herb Alpert and Lani Hall perform at 8 p.m. Feb. 20 at the Arcadia Performing Arts Center. Tickets, ranging from \$29 to \$99, are available at [arcadiapaf.org](http://arcadiapaf.org). The Arcadia Performing Arts Center is located at 188 Campus Dr., Arcadia. Call (626) 821-1781 or visit the website.



Alpert's Vibrato Grill & Jazz Restaurant was praised for its "Impeccable acoustics" by TimeOut.com.

