



There's a party on the lot today. Musicians and bizzers and friends of friends breeze through the open gates of A&M Records to sip cold drinks, munch pretzels and mingle with the A&M staff. Risers and amps make an instant stage at one side of what's usually an executive parking lot, cleared of Beemers and Benzes this afternoon and surrounded, as always, by the cozy, ivy-covered warrens that were once part of Charlie Chaplin's film studios. ■ Today's

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main event is a performance by Sounds of Blackness, a 40-piece gospel-rap choir here to inaugurate A&M's partnership with Perspective, a new record label run by Jimmy "Jam" Harris and Terry Lewis. The Sounds rock the crowd with a blend of deep-massage harmonies, healing-tent exuberance and street-edged militancy. And what a crowd this is: Taking in the show from the front stoop of A&M's recording studios are tattooed love boys Mötley Crüe. There's Bruce Springsteen standing on the fringe. And, of

BY MARK ROWLAND
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NORMAN SEEFF

course, Messrs. Harris and Lewis, the most successful producer-songwriting team of the day—Janet Jackson, a major hitmaker for the label, is largely their creation—looking natty in double-breasted suits.

Amidst such pop royalty it's easy to overlook one middle-aged guy wearing a casual shirt, jeans, sneakers and a cap that bears the company logo, taking in the action from the side of the stage with an enigmatic half-smile. One wouldn't guess that he's sold more records than any other artist here. Or that the sales of those records started this company, acquired this lot and built these recording studios.

Herb Alpert, 56, strolls around the corner and disappears into his office. The party goes on.

The office has been lived in for 25 years, and it shows. There are mementos on the walls, clutter on the

desk and, on the floor, a bust of Herb that looks like it might function as a doorstop. A Spanish arch spans the middle of the room; beyond it stands a black Steinway grand. The back wall is papered with a career's worth of publicity stills, though the eye is drawn immediately to a classic mid-'60s photo of Alpert as leader of the Tijuana Brass, gazing with dark sensuality from under the wide brim of a gaucho's hat.

"Years back I was playing in Las Vegas," he recalls, "and a lady came up and said, 'You're melancholy in a happy way.'" Alpert laughs softly. "Which I think is pretty true. I hear that undertone. When most people think of me, they probably think 'Tijuana Taxi,' something buoyant. I don't think that's totally indicative of my scope."

He's talking music, but the description suits the man as well. Alpert's manner suggests a mix of serenity and restlessness, ease and discipline; for all his success, he considers himself a work in progress. On his last record, he blew trumpet to

The bountiful life of
Herb Alpert,
trumpeter philanthropist

contemporary hip-hop rhythms; the next one, he suggests, may veer more in the direction of mainstream jazz.

Alpert still gets up around six every morning, goes into his studio and practices the horn. Then he exercises on a treadmill, has breakfast, practices some more. "I think I always had the need to be heard," he observes. "The trumpet is one of those instruments where you can't cover up a mistake—it could be one of the reasons I chose it. But the horn has been an incredible friend to me over the years too. It's been my barometer. It reflects how I'm feeling."

There was a time in the early '70s when "the trumpet was not speaking, I was blaming it on the mouthpiece, the valve system, trying to blame it on everything but where the blame really lay. Which was, I wasn't feeling good. Then I realized that I was going through some stressful times, and that I had to iron some things out before the horn was going to speak as a friend.

"But that's what I love about being a musician," he adds. "When you're not getting what you want, you gotta look inward."

Spiritual references flow like grace notes through Alpert's conversation, which—along with his penchant for giving crystals to his friends—arouses the specter of the New Age. But he also walks the walk. His Herb Alpert Foundation, created in 1986, has funneled millions of dollars into music scholarships, ecological projects and such socially oriented programs as Brotherhood/Sisterhood, which brings together kids of different backgrounds to confront the causes and effects of cultural prejudice. Moreover, Alpert works actively with organizations that are the objects of his philanthropy.

"I never wanted to get to the place where I'd just write a check and send it to some huge organization where ninety percent of the money goes to administration," he says. "So the object became: Do something small real well. Maybe even see if we can creatively improve upon what someone else has started. And most importantly, do something that can be replicated by someone in another place. I'm not good at soliciting, but I'd like to get to where, if we send out information on the Foundation letterhead, people will trust it and take notice."

Many of the Foundation's efforts are geared toward kids "because

that's where the hope is. Kids need guidance. They need warmth and love and understanding, and there are so many without it. I might have had one or three traumatic experiences, but you've got kids where it's happening all day to them, one after another. They're into overload, they're into tilt.

"There's a real sickness going on in our civilization," he goes on, the measured cadence of his speech belying his intensity. "I think we're spiritually bankrupt at the moment. And we better start addressing that or we're going to self-destruct. Because the madness and the violence that are going on in this city are just as toxic, more toxic, than the pollution and smog we're complaining about. We all have to do something about it or we're not owing up to our moral responsibilities. We should all be pulling for each other."

Alpert pauses for breath and smiles, slightly abashed. "Thank you, Mr. President," he laughs.

These days, Foundation work takes up half of Alpert's time; much of the rest is spent playing, composing, painting. He's no longer as deep-

"The horn has been an incredible friend to me over the

ly involved with A&M, the label he cofounded with Jerry Moss out of his garage in 1962, since the pair sold the company to PolyGram in 1989 for a reported \$500 million. "I'm not involved in the everyday running of the label, I'm more concerned with the overall feeling of it," he says. "I always wanted this company to be a haven for artists who felt comfortable being here. It gets increasingly difficult with the growth and lawyers and deals that are floating around. But I think Jerry and I always wanted to treat them the way we'd want to be treated. We felt it would come back. And it certainly has."

Alpert's imprint on the label remains apparent. Employees are still impressed that when he and Moss sold the company, they gave cash bonuses—some well into five figures—to everyone on the lot. Several of Alpert's large-scale abstract paintings hang in the hallways of A&M's world-class recording studio, and Tijuana Brass paraphernalia—a conga here, a poster there—can be found in several office bungalows. Other evidence is less tangible. Call it a vibe.

"A&M has always felt different from other labels," says Jimmy "Jam" Harris. "It's not such a corporate structure. And if you're in a free environment, it allows your mind to be free."

Harris has known Alpert as a label boss, as an artist (he and Lewis produced several tracks on Alpert's 1987 *Keep Your Eye on Me* LP, including a top-five pop hit, "Diamonds"), and now, with Perspective Records, as a business partner. No matter what hat he's wearing, "I find that Herb is very much the same person," Harris says. "It never comes down to a matter of how much to spend, but what feels good to do.

"Sounds of Blackness is a project I know we couldn't have gotten through on another label; nobody would have accepted us doing something so different right out of the box. They would have said, 'Bring us a couple of Janet Jackson clones first.' That's how businesspeople think. But Herb called us up and said, 'I'm proud to be associated with this record.' I said, 'Thanks, I've been getting good feedback on it.' And he said, 'Fuck the feedback, just be

proud of this record! Don't even worry about it.'" Harris chuckles. "You don't expect to hear that from the president of a record company.

"I think as people get older they tend to get set in their ways. But Herb is the kind of person who stays contemporary—he may not like the new way of doing things, but he can do it as well as anyone else. In his studios he's got the latest keyboards and drum machines, and he can run them all. As a musician he embraces change. That attitude carries through to your business and the kind of person you are."

Nevertheless, Alpert's pleasant demeanor can be deceptive. "Herb is really competitive," Harris warns. "We pride ourselves on winning the games that are played in our studio, whether it's Nintendo or Ping-Pong. Terry was our resident Ping-Pong champ, and when Herb came in they had a game and bet five dollars. And Herb commenced to whip Terry's ass," he laughs. "You have to have that ambition to be where he's at. You can be nice and centered—and also be a very driven person."

Has Alpert surprised him in other

ways? "Only one," says Harris. "I always thought he was Latin."

Herb Alpert was born in Los Angeles on March 31, 1935, the youngest child of three. His father, Louis Alpert, had emigrated from Russia at the age of 16 and worked downtown as a manufacturer of women's clothes. He also played mandolin. Herb's mom, Tillie, whose parents came from Rumania, had received classical training as a violinist. Sister Mimi studied piano and brother Dave played drums. At the age of eight, Herb picked up the trumpet.

He grew up in the Fairfax district and was bar mitzvahed at 13, "but I really didn't relate to it," he says. "It was more forced on me. I feel good about being Jewish, but I don't really feel good about the rituals. I think all religions should get together. But we're influenced by the people we grew up around. Every time my dad had a chance he'd send money home, and little by little was greatly responsible for bringing his entire family over here. He was a giving person, and that always felt right to me."

At Fairfax High, while his friends

were "working part time, six days a week," Alpert was "playing three or four nights, making twice as much and getting all the pretty girls. It all seemed to work out rather well." He majored in music at USC, joined the army and played in the band, honing his technique by sounding taps at as many as 18 military funerals a day. And he married his high school sweetheart. Following his 1956 discharge, he resumed the rounds of society gigs around town, sometimes in combos with his brother and a veteran pianist named Sol Lake, and found session work in Hollywood—you can hear him in *The Ten Commandments* (and see him, as well, in a cameo). With an aspiring lyricist named Lou Adler, Alpert began writing songs and struck gold in 1960 when they joined forces with Sam Cooke to write "(What a) Wonderful World," an instant pop standard. They also produced singles for Jan and Dean and a cover of "Alley-Oop" for one-hit wonders Dante and the Evergreens.

By the early '60s, Los Angeles was beginning to experience the side effects of a 40-year population boom,

but the music business was still surprisingly fraternal. "In New York, if my boss was making a record and the coffee boy came in, they'd just stop the sessions and hide the lead sheets," recalls Jerry Moss, who'd worked there as a promotion man before moving to the West Coast in 1960. "They were all so concerned that someone would copy what they were doing. Whereas, in the early days of Phil Spector, it was not uncommon to actually sit in on a session and see what Phil did and how he did it and be thrilled by that music. Everyone knew each other, and the openness was so much more fun than what I'd experienced in New York."

Moss and Alpert began running into each other, and soon became pals. "We'd go out for an evening, have a meal and then hit a couple of the piano bars," Moss relates. "They might ask Herbie to sit in for a while. And it was just fun for me to sit there at the bar, have a couple of drinks and listen to my friend play this wonderful horn."

"I admired Herb as a music man, that was the first thing. After getting to know him, I was touched that this

years. It reflects how I'm feeling."

was a real guy. He didn't lie to you, he didn't change his mind—a lot—and if he said he would do something he did it. Beyond that, there was something special about him. Whether it was the same charisma that attracted me to him as a friend that later attracted millions to him as an artist... it could be the same thing."

Not that Moss or anyone else expected Alpert to become a star. Pooling their resources on an instrumental version of Sol Lake's "Twinkle Star" was, as Moss puts it, "get rich idea 3,428." But one Sunday in 1962, while working on its arrangement, they decided to take in the bullfights in Tijuana. "It was just one of those moments," Alpert says. "You know, there's this fanfare they do between events at a bullfight, and the bull comes out, and the picador—it was so visual. I was trying to capture that feeling." He attached a few "Olé!"s to the front of the song. Moss retitled it "The Lonely Bull," by "The Tijuana Brass, featuring Herb Alpert," and they put out a single that sold 700,000 copies and put A&M Records on the map.

Alpert's "Ameriachi sound," as it

came to be dubbed, had more in common with Dixieland than any sort of Latin music, but his loose, swinging trumpet—taking a cue from jazz heroes like Clifford Brown, he never rehearsed his solos before recording them—was undeniably infectious. Three years passed without any more hits from the Tijuana Brass, but by mid-1965, tracks like "The Mexican Shuffle," "Whipped Cream" and "A Taste of Honey" had elevated Alpert from local obscurity to national phenomenon. At one point in early 1966, the Tijuana Brass had five albums in the top 20, and were outselling the Beatles two to one. Their first 13 albums went platinum.

Ironically, Herb's musical success ended his brother's career in music. "I had a construction business going, but I was still playing gigs at night when Herb became famous," Dave Alpert recalls. "I'd be playing a Jewish wedding at the Sportsman's Lodge and someone would point me out and say, 'There's Herb Alpert's brother.' After that, I just wanted to stop." When A&M bought the Chaplin Studios lot from CBS (for \$1 mil-

lion cash), Dave was asked to help renovate it. He's been there ever since, as A&M's vice-president in charge of buildings, management and maintenance.

Herb had little time to savor his celebrity. In 1966, for instance, he recorded two albums with the Tijuana Brass, produced a third for Sergio Mendes and Brasil '66 (all were big hits—indeed, 16 of A&M's first 25 LP releases became gold records) and was on the road for five months, performing for audiences of as many as 20,000 people a night. He'd become an industry in himself—playing more and enjoying it less.

"I remember being in the studio one afternoon. The *Going Places* album was almost complete, and Jerry called to say we had advance orders for a million and a half records. Instead of being excited, I felt a little let down. When I translated it later, it felt like, 'Hey, maybe I'm making buttons here. Maybe people are just crazed into this and are not really appreciating it for what it is.' I felt a little cheated in some odd way."

He didn't react immediately. "For years," he notes, "TJB supplied

about ninety percent of the label's income, so there was some pressure to keep it going"—but eventually A&M's roster expanded to include such popular troubadours as Carole King, Cat Stevens, Joe Cocker and the Carpenters. By 1970 Tijuana Brass sales had fallen off sharply, and Alpert broke up the band.

His first marriage fell apart as well, and he began what he calls his "what's it all about, Alfie" season of soul-searching. "I realized that the American Dream had come true for me—and it really wasn't giving me what I thought I was looking for. And with that came insecurities and a kind of stuttering through the horn."

Eventually Alpert found his way. In 1974, he married former Brasil '66 singer Lani Hall. Hall won a Grammy in 1986 for Best Latin Pop perfor-

to A&M's pride and balance sheet. And in the resulting financial climate, Alpert's plan to resurrect A&M's jazz label *Horizon*—with a World Beat slant, under the aegis of KCRW disc jockey Tom Schnabel—never took wing. But music business fortunes are often pendular, and with four number-one singles so far (by Extreme, Amy Grant, *Sounds of Blackness* and Bryan Adams), 1991 looks to be among the more successful annus in the company's 29-year history.

Even by California standards, Alpert appears to have aged well. His dark hair generously salted with gray, he looks healthy, fit and in control of his life.

"Yeah, I am," he agrees. "I've worked at it, though."

Selling the company has had the



mance and still records for A&M. Alpert, meanwhile, has released a series of stylish, unpredictable records that zigzag from jazz to disco ("Rise" was a number-one hit in 1979) to Brazilian pop—as well as a line of perfume called Listen ("a fragrance is like a melody"), launched in 1988. (Alpert's sister Mimi runs the perfume operation, where daughter Aria is also employed; daughter Eden works for the foundation; and son Dore is on staff at A&M's publishing arm, Almo-Irving music.)

A&M records has continued to survive, even thrive, nourishing the careers of pop icons such as Janet Jackson, Sting and the Neville Brothers. It hasn't been a cakewalk, of course. Last year, at the height of her success, Jackson left the label—a blow

dual effect of deepening the Foundation's coffers while broadening his sense of mission. "I feel very blessed to live the life that I have, and I have an obligation and a responsibility to do the right thing. I can't speak for other musicians, but the world that I experience when I'm playing that horn, or sitting at the piano writing, is a better world than the one we're living in. It vibrates on a more beautiful level than the one I come back to when I watch the five o'clock news."

"But you can't just shut the curtains and wear blinders. And a lot of people do. They pretend things aren't happening when they are. So, we gotta rattle those people. Some of them have the money, the wherewithal, to be able to reach out and help. I'd like to be a party to help stir up some of that."