

# Orchestra lets Herb Alpert go full toot

BY GARY GRAFF  
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The last time he played his trumpet with an orchestra, Herb Alpert didn't exactly live up to the stellar reputation he currently enjoys.

"Oh, it had to be when I was at USC, when I played in the orchestra there," remembered Alpert, 53. "We were playing Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition.'

"I was sitting in the middle of the orchestra, and I was so knocked out by the sound going around me that I forgot to come in at one point. I was so enamored that I forgot my part."

Alpert hasn't forgotten many other parts during his past 25 years of recording and performing — he also hasn't performed with an orchestra during that time. Now he's standing in front of them, rather than sitting in the middle, as part of a nine-city tour to promote his new album, "Under a

Spanish Moon."

The idea for the tour popped into Alpert's head during a recent visit to Washington, where he was pitched to play a benefit for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. He turned down that offer — "You can't just go play with an

conductor known for his work on TV series and for pop artists such as Whitney Houston, Jermaine Jackson and Earth, Wind & Fire. Alpert asked him to orchestrate "A Taste of Honey," just to see what Del Barrio would come up with.

"It just blew me away."

Alpert said of hearing the new version of the song. "He came up with this extraordinary arrangement, things I'd never considered before. It was a different groove, a different rhythm — everything. He gave it a real face-lift."

So Alpert commissioned Del Barrio

**"To be standing in front of all that music, it's just amazing."**

HERB ALPERT

orchestra," he said — but the concept intrigued him.

So when he returned to the Los Angeles offices of A&M Records, which he founded with Jerry Moss in 1962, Alpert started casting for a collaborator to prepare orchestral arrangements of his songs. He hooked George Del Barrio, a composer and

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to write a suite for trumpet and orchestra, which became the three-movement title track for the new album. He also picked up a song from pop star Sting, who's been recording for A&M since the start of his band, the Police. "I asked him if he minded," Alpert said with a chuckle. "He said, 'You're the boss; you can do whatever you want.' I said, 'Wait a minute. It's *your* song.'"

That kind of relationship has made Alpert's dual roles as recording artist and record company executive tricky. He considers himself the artists' advocate at the company, "trying to represent the artist's point of view," but as a performer himself, he's been tempted to use the talent at his executive disposal for his own means.

To his credit, he's been reluctant to do that. A case in point is Janet Jackson's singing on "Diamonds," a hit from his "Keep Your Eye on Me" album released last year. "I was very reluctant to have her do that," Alpert said. "I didn't want it to look like Janet was coming to my rescue. But (the album's producers) insisted on it, and it obviously worked well.

"But I'd never want to get into the position of trying to use any of the people on the label just because their presence would sell my records. If it happens organically, that's fine."

A&M's silver anniversary, however, has given Alpert a chance to reflect on his company's achievements. He has reason to be pleased. Though not as powerful as huge conglomerates like CBS Records or Warner-Elektra, A&M has had several hits over the years, including Joe Jackson, Cat Stevens, Peter Frampton and pertramp.

With the Police, Joe Jackson and Squeeze, it was one of the first American labels to embrace British new wave during the late '70s, and — thanks to

visionary vice-president John McClain, its roster currently boasts a strong stable of rhythm 'n' blues acts. Classical and music video divisions are currently growing and Alpert also talks about expanding the company's jazz repertoire.

"We started out in my garage as a little boutique trying to make nice and interesting music," Alpert said. "We've tried to hold to that course through the years, and I think we've done that. We're a good home for an artist who wants to make good, challenging music." Or, he could add, for an owner who wants to blow his own horn in front of orchestras.