

An exclusive HITS interview with
Herb Alpert, Co-Founder A&M Records
by Joe Medwick

HORN OF PLENTY



When you walk into Herb Alpert's modest, lived-in office on the A&M lot, the first thing you think is, I must be in the wrong place. But when you get a

chance to adjust your eyes to the dim, non-neon atmosphere of Herb's hideaway, it begins to make perfect sense. Here is a guy who has recorded 32 records (including 14 platinum and 15 gold), has won seven Grammys and been nominated 16 times and whose world-wide record sales have surpassed the 72 million mark but whose actions and words have never been accompanied by the arrogance and pretension that are baggage with so many other ego-driven entertainers or executives. That kind of low-

key, honest approach to record-making has been the key to the success of the label he and Jerry Moss started in Herb's garage in 1962 with \$200.

Herb's latest album release, "Midnight Sun," is his much-anticipated first official foray into jazz, a music that has always touched his spirit and work. The disc also includes the Herb-meister's first solo vocalizing since his '60s classic, "This Guy's In Love With You." HITS resident Tijuana Brass groupie and model for the album cover of "Whipped Cream and Other Delights," Joe "Better Dead Than" Medwick spoke to Mr. A. about jazz, karma and why he should hire him as his food-taster. —>

This album is the 32nd record of your career, but some are calling it your first "real" jazz record. Do you see it as that?

I don't see it as a jazz record. I know Stan Getz had a huge impact on "Midnight Sun," but it was really influenced by everyone I ever heard. Prior to becoming a recording artist, I used to do weddings and parties and so on. I used to do two or three gigs a weekend and I have a stockpile of songs from that time that are in my memory and over the years I seem to keep coming back to them and listening to them. I just decided to record those melodies. I thought there was a lack of that on the radio. Being a record and radio scanner, I'm always looking for melodies.

Do you see people getting hung up on format and missing the beauty of a classic melody?

I've always wanted to see if I could swim in deeper water. If I was really pushed to the wall, I'd have to say I'm a closet jazz musician! I'm comin' out now, so it's no secret! I like jazz's freedom of expression and I try to bring that to all my music. Just reaching back and playing what you're feeling, interpreting melodies in a personal way. When one can do that, they are in the jazz arena.

Music is an instinctual thing for you.

That's the ingredient which separates the artist from those who are just trying to sell records. Louis Armstrong said it best — if you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know. It's in the abstract. What is it about a melody or a rhythm that puts one person in total arrest and the next person staring at the wall like nothin's going on? That's magic. What is it? It's something that doesn't register on the word level.

Is this really the first record you've sung on since '68?

Well, I did do a couple of things with my wife Lani [Hall]. I did a follow-up to "This Guy's In Love With You." The name escapes me, but it was written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. It went something like... Y'know, I can't remember a word!

I remember the first time I

heard "This Guy," I was on my paper route and I didn't know Burt Bacharach from Jeff Beck, but what a feel.

That's just the way I felt when I heard the demo of the song. At that point, it was called "This Girl's In Love With You." When I heard it, I liked it immediately, but of course, I had to switch the gender! It really is all about material. When a song is there, you really have to go a long way to ruin it.

With this "unplugged" movement happening in rock, it's cool that you've made, in your words, "a real live human record."

out of him and does his editing from that.

It's a very dizzying, almost cinematic style.

I always look for that. After "The Lonely Bull," it always struck me that visual music, especially from an instrumentalist, is very important. The trick is to conjure up images from your soul.

There seems to be a movement in pop to get back to the basics of good music, whatever the genre.

Hopefully, we're getting back to the basics as artists, as people and as a civilization. Man, we've got to stop b.s.-ing each other. We're all

bullseye because most of the time we were looking for what was *not* on the radio. We thought, little by little, the audience would get used to our records if they were made with the right integrity, which we tried to do, and packaged appropriately. We knew, if a record was good, eventually there would be an audience for it.

A&M has always been known as an artist's label.

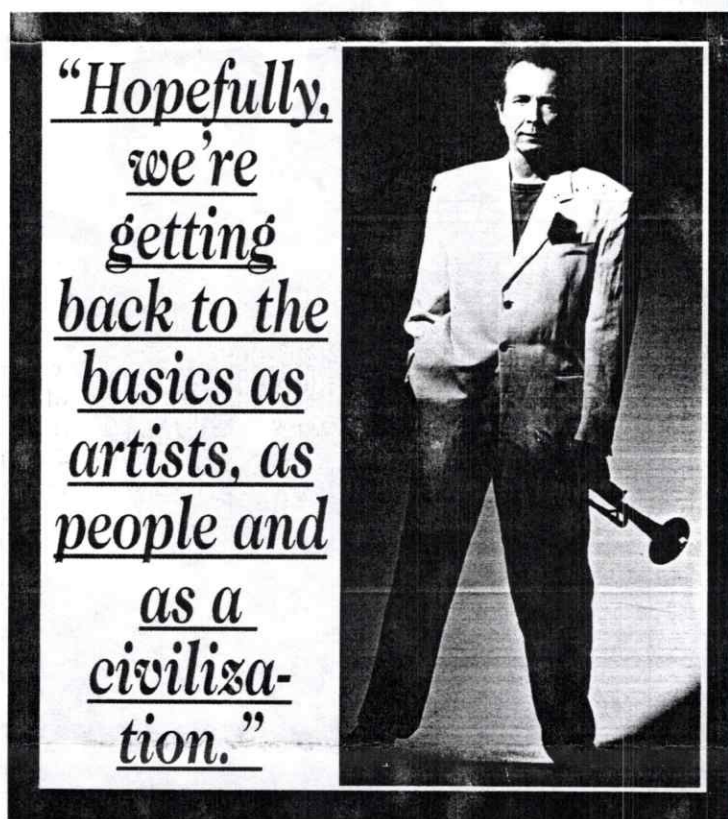
We try. We've always tried to make the environment right for the artist to do what they have to do, and if you try to do that with too many restrictions, you don't really get the best results. But I've always been surrounded by a tremendous group of people that make me look good. I certainly can't do it alone. I'm not a businessman by background, so I don't have that expertise or that desire to get into the everyday workings of the company. But I was very fortunate in being able to follow my bliss and nourish my spirit by doing the music that was coming out of me. And to have a partner like Jerry Moss, who understood that was the best thing for me. It allowed us to gradually surround ourselves with people who were sensitive to what we started. And it's been a beautiful trip.

How do you explain the longevity of the relationship between you and Jerry?

Jerry and I formed this label on a handshake. We admire and respect each other, and people that work with us feel that as well. That's been the key. If you treat people with kindness and respect, it just comes back to you. It doesn't surprise me that this company has been so successful. If I was to explore that side of it, the formula seems rather easy. Of course, luck plays a part in it, too. And timing. To be at the right place at the right time and to be prepared when you get there.

I know you feel very fortunate to have been able to spend some time with Stan Getz. Can you talk a little about your relationship with him?

I loved Stan. We became very close the last three years of his life. I first made contact with him because I knew he was free from a



Yeah, we had some fine players on the record. Frank Collett was on piano, Monty Budwig, who's just a phenomenal musician, played acoustic bass, Harvey Mason was on drums, Larry Carlton, Barry Zweig and John Pisano on guitar. Eddie del Barrio just did an extraordinary job of orchestrating the arranging. He's originally from Argentina, but he's been living here for quite some time. He has a real unusual approach to strings because he just writes straight from his gut. He doesn't start with the paper and design it like the way most orchestrators and arrangers do. He just lets it pour

looking for people with pure intentions. Politicians that are telling the truth. Artists that are real. And that's the hardest thing to do, to come in a straight line without having ulterior motives for twisting a note or playing something that might sound clever. **It's the same kind of thinking you've always applied to your record label.**

No doubt about it. Jerry and I started A&M in my garage in '62. We tried to make records we would buy ourselves and pick out artists that we had a feeling for. We weren't really thinking in terms of hitting the middle of the

recording contract and I wanted to know if he wanted to do another album. So we hooked up at my house about four or five years ago and talked about music and jazz. I asked him if there was any type of album he'd like to make that he hadn't made. He told me that "Focus" was his all-time favorite album. And it struck me that he never really had the opportunity to write music or he never really pursued that. He had the ability, but he really didn't push that part of his talent. I thought it would be nice to do an album where he could get to participate in the actual melodic structuring of the music. Essentially that's what he did on "Focus." There was beautiful orchestration on that record and Stan just improvised over the top of it with the chord structures that were given to him. So we talked about doing something like that and he asked me if I wanted to produce it and I said absolutely not because I heard he was a terror to work with and I didn't want any more gray in my hair at this point in my life. To actually hear someone say that I think shocked him and he said he wasn't like that anymore. He also realized that he was now at another place, at a new plateau. I really miss him because he was a beautiful human being. What I saw was a lovely, sensitive, caring person and a wonderful friend. We talked a lot about jazz and I eventually agreed to do the record with him, which became the "Appassionato" album. He loved the album and he wanted to do something for me — like be-bop lessons! There were a handful of magical musicians that walked this earth and obviously Stan Getz was one.

What impact did he have on the recording of "Midnight Sun"?

I spoke to a great many jazz musicians about how they create. Everyone has their own unique approach to it, because that's the way jazz is. It's one of those individual art forms. But the way Stan put it was so clean. He said jazz is not about playing licks or fancy lines, it's about a logical beginning, middle and end. It's a story. You first have to get your



NO, IT DOESN'T STAND FOR ARCHY & MEHITIBAL: A&M co-founders **Herb Alpert** (l) and **Jerry Moss** audition for their Gap ad. (BOTTOM) **HERB'S COOL AND QUINCY'S (OPEN) FLY**: It's a little known fact A&M founder **Herb Alpert** (r) and **Quincy Jones** were the original choices for the leads in "I Spy," until Quincy showed up for the screen test with his resume showing.

"To me, that's what music is all about... experiencing the moment."



vocabulary down, then you can do what you have to do. Close your eyes and just play.

Stan kept drilling into me the fact he never played a note he didn't mean! Essentially, what he was trying to do was to let it be an experience of the moment. I've always instinctively tried to do that, but now I'm zeroing in more

than ever. To me, that's what music is all about... experiencing the moment.

Do you see jazz being accepted on the radio in any real way?

Jazz is the only real artform we can take credit for in this country. It's ours. You go to Europe and get treated like royalty; for years, you

get the red carpet treatment. Because there they admire what you're doing; it's not the beat of the week. For some reason, in this country, we're not relaxed enough to be able to appreciate artists on that level. But it's just a matter of time because jazz is the real heartbeat, the real spirit of man. Jazz can also serve as a history of what's good and bad about our country, especially regarding racial gains and struggles.

I don't think it will get lost. Jazz is growing, it's honest, it's real, it's what we're looking for as a society. We want it from our politicians and we're going to require it from those musicians who are just brave enough to reflect on how they're feeling.

So it's not a matter of genre as much as heart.

I totally agree with that. Artists should be able to simply reflect the way they truly feel at the time. It's like the Carpenters. These were two kids that loved what they were doing and who made music that was from their hearts. When you do that, it can't be categorized as hip, arty, commercial or not commercial. This is the music they heard. This is the music they made with loving care. They picked songs they loved. They surrounded themselves with musicians they loved. So it was their music. Like it or not.

If you want to sing or play rock & roll, you've got to be rock & roll. If you want to play jazz, you've got to be jazz. You can't just dial it up on your computer. It's like when I asked Stan to give me some be-bop lessons. It took plenty of work, but I was willing to put in the work. There's no magic pill and drugs won't get you there either; it's hard work that'll get you there. That's the lesson I learned from Stan on this record. ■