

# FOR A SONG

## HERB ALPERT FINDS HIS HORN OF PLENTY AGAIN

Through the 1960s, Herb Alpert and his Tijuana Brass were the monster group of Ameriachi, the Beatles of the cucaracha beat. Then, in 1969, Herb suddenly disbanded the Brass. Of course, why not? He had already turned out 13 gold albums in seven years. Besides, his record company, A&M—with such other artists as Burt Bacharach and the Carpenters—had gotten so big it took over Charlie Chaplin's old Hollywood lot, and so lucrative that Herb reportedly gave his nephew the 12-story International Hotel at the L.A. Airport as a bar mitzvah present.

Now, after celebrated gigs, first in Dallas, then at Harrah's in Lake Tahoe and the release this week of the Brass's most sophisticated album to date, *You Smile—The Song Begins*, Alpert, 39, has finally revealed the reason behind his hiatus. He suffered from a psychological block that took over four years therapy and a new woman in his life to conquer. "I just couldn't play the horn anymore," Herb recalls. "Until then, it had been the absolute best friend in my life," Alpert reflects, humanizing the instrument. "He had made it possible for me to make some bread, meet some ladies. Now he turned against me. He was trying to tell

me I had to reevaluate what was happening to me emotionally."

What was happening to Alpert was the failure of his first marriage and a career success so overwhelming as to make the rest of his life seem unreal. For example, before his *Going Places* album was even in the stores, the advance sales were over a million. "My immediate reaction was sadness," Alpert recalls. "It took the fun out of it." By '69 his trumpet "began stuttering. I just couldn't get my chops back in shape," Alpert says. "Panic set in." With the help of his sidemen he was able to "completely fake" a previously scheduled TV special and he went ahead on a subsequent European tour only because "we were to play for the Queen of England. The queen and Prince Philip called me from backstage to meet them. The prince told me he had all my music. I had this image of Buckingham Palace with Prince Philip sitting in the den at night playing my music. Incredible! . . ."

And so it was to a man born in Los Angeles of Russian parentage. Only seven years earlier Herb's best bookings were weddings. With the instant success of the Tijuana Brass, he found himself "suddenly recognized as



DOUG CAM PFEILL

Alpert's gig in Dallas with a restaffed Brass ended a silence since 1969.

an authority on everything in the world—like the war in Vietnam, for example. When the horn jammed up, I had no way to say anything."

To the rescue came Lani Hall, songstress with Sergio Mendes & Brasil '66, an old friend of Herb's. The pair flew off to Tahiti and then Hawaii. "I remember sitting on the beach," says Herb. "Lani had me make a list of everything that bugged me—people, things. Immediately after I finished the list I felt better." More important, he also sought professional help—traditional analysis briefly and a successful year and a half of behavioral psychology. This winter he was ready for the "personal challenge of seeing if I could still get a group together. At the first rehearsal I flashed on a series of images—my ex-wife, my two kids, tours. I broke out in a sweat and turned yellow. I had to tell the guys I was having problems. But it gradually got better."

A Dallas shakedown of the new Brass went off without a stutter, and the big opening at Harrah's followed last month. Lani Hall is the girl vocalist in the group and still lives with Herb in their three-bedroom spread on the Pacific at Trancas. Just before last Christmas, they were married—sort of. "We married ourselves," Alpert says. "I was eating an apple and watching a football game on television. Lani walked in all dressed up, and I realized something was going on. I asked her if she would give me a chance to get shaved. She had it all set up on the bed—a book of poems by E. E. Cummings, a book of Van Gogh's paintings we both love, candles, a sculpted elephant for strength. We had worked out marriage vows. Later we took out a license, but I don't want to rush the ceremony. It becomes a matter of where and when, whom to invite." Maybe, just The Horn.

BARBARA WILKINS



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His artistic anxiety mirrored on the bathroom wall at his A&M Records office, Herb Alpert contemplates his comeback.

Lani Hall, "the lady in my life," as he introduces her during performances, gives Herb a little offstage encouragement during a walk (right) and later in their Harrah's quarters (far right) during his triumphant Lake Tahoe return.



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