

# Herb Alpert finds 'freedom' in jazz, from 'Whipped Cream' to 'Over the Rainbow'

Brin Blueskye, Palm Springs Desert SunPublished 9:00 .m. PT Jan. 23, 2020

I'd just asked jazz trumpeter, artist and sculptor Herb Alpert my last question when he flipped the script on me in a recent interview.

"What do you like about jazz?" he asked.

I told him how I only used to listen to jazz at night because it's great mood music, but that I listen to it any time of the day now.

Do you feel the freedom of it? If so, then you get it," Alpert replied.

That's the only explanation the 84-year-old musician provides for the source of his creativity. "I don't think when I make music, paint or sculpt," he told me during a previous interview. "I let creativity speak without being filtered."



Herb Alpert and his wife, singer Lani Hall, return to the McCallum Theatre Jan. 27. (Photo: Courtesy of the McCallum Theatre)

This is how Alpert approached his latest album, "Over the Rainbow," a compilation of covers of well-known pop songs. Released last September, it features tracks such as Louis Armstrong's "What A Wonderful World," Barry Manilow's "Copacabana" and "Always On My Mind" by Wayne Carson, Johnny Christopher and Mark James.

"I picked out songs that touch me," Alpert told me. "I like melodies and there's no intellectual reason on why I do this stuff. I try to take my brain out of the mix."

Alpert rose to fame in the early '60s when he incorporated world music influences in his instrumental variations of popular tunes, mostly Latin brass music. He worked with members of the Wrecking Crew, a collective of Los Angeles session musicians, on his first four albums released under the name "Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass."

The fourth album, "Whipped Cream and Other Delights," released in 1965 and featured covers of pop standards like Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller's "Love Potion No. 9," Bobby Scott and Ric Marlow's "A Taste of Honey" and Tony Velona's "Lollipops and Roses." The album cover, featuring model Dolores Erickson covered in whipped cream, was just as memorable as the music. It went on to sell six million copies in America and was remixed in 2006 by producer Anthony Marinelli as Whipped Cream & Other Delights Re-Whipped.



Jamie Hartinger with Herb Alpert album t Record Store Dy t Shake It Records, April 13, 2019. When asked why this particular album, Hartinger pointed to the cover. "The girl! It's classic Herb." (Photo: Ryan Terhune / *The Enquirer*)

Following the release of that album, Alpert formed an actual version of the Tijuana Brass with musicians John Pisano (electric guitar), Lou Pagani (piano), Nick Ceroli (drums), Pat Senatore (bass guitar), Tonni Kalash (trumpet) and Bob Edmondson (trombone) before disbanding four years later in 1969.

But he's still performing and recording, translating well-known lyric lines into jazz trumpet tracks.

Alpert will perform with his wife, vocalist Lani Hall, at the McCallum Theatre on Jan. 27. He discussed some of the songs on his latest album, technological changes in the music industry and music education with *The Desert Sun*.

The following interview was edited for length and clarity.

**The Desert Sun: What made you want to do "Over the Rainbow"?**

Herb Alpert: Instinct. I don't think too hard about this stuff. I hear songs that I like and sometimes I'll hear a standard song like "Over the Rainbow" and I'll say, "Can I do this in a way that hasn't been done quite that way before?" If I come up with that then it's a pursuit of mine.



Herb Alpert performing t the 2017 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. (Photo: Amy Harris, *Invision/P*)

**“Over the Rainbow” is such an iconic song. Do you ever wish you recorded it earlier?**

I didn't have the idea to do it earlier. Even when I thought about doing it, I thought, "Who wants to hear this song? It's been recorded about 14 billion times." When I came up with this idea of working with (composer) Eduardo del Barrio and putting that intro on it and expressing the lyric through the trumpet, it worked and it felt good. I listen to my instincts and I'm a right-brained guy. I paint, I sculpt, make music and try to do it as authentically as I can.

**You did a cover of Bill Withers “Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone.” Was that difficult to translate into a jazz song because of the well-known lyrics?**

It was easy to translate because it's a beautiful melody and the lyrics are wonderful. I always try to play the lyrics through the trumpet. It's a little challenging because the Bill Withers record is memorable and one most people treasure. I didn't want to step on it in any way and wanted it to be my own way of presenting it. When we hit on it, it felt good. That's the beautiful part about the arts for me it's all about a feeling and if you think too hard about it, you lose the feeling. If you try to analyze a piece of art, I think you go past it, go sideways but not go in it. To go in it, you must forget what you know and go for the feeling.

**You incorporated a lot of different sounds and instruments from around the world into Louis Armstrong's “What A Wonderful World.” Why did you do that?**

I was doing “What A Wonderful World” in a way that honored Louis Armstrong, because I wasn't trying to cover it but express the idea that what he said and answer the question kids asked him like, "What do you mean it's a wonderful world? What about the destruction, the wars and the poverty?" and he'd say, "It's all about love, baby." But I wanted to play that song and, in the middle, put in instruments from all over the world and how we are all united as artists. We're all interconnected, and I think that's the way I think a lot of us would like the world to feel.



Herb Alpert received the National Medal of the Arts from President Obama in 2013. (Photo: Submitted)

**Recording technology has come a long way. Do you feel that 's made music better or that the beauty of recording music has gone away?**

When I started before tape recorders, I had a Webcor wire recorder. This was before tape was invented. You couldn't edit on that, if you wanted to. You needed a soldering iron. Then there was the mono machine and a two-track stereo, then there was three-track, four-track, eight-track and 16-track. The digital age came with zeros and ones and now there's infinite numbers of tracks. It's a whole different world.

In the '60s and '70s, we used to get the band together in the studio to record and feel the energy of all the musicians I worked with. I did an album called “Whipped Cream & Other Delights Re-Whipped” based off the “Whipped Cream & Other Delights” album with producers from different parts of the country that remixed that album and wanted me to add a couple of horn parts. They would send me what they were working on and I'd put on the horn part that I liked at my studio and send them back just the trumpet and they'd put my trumpet back into the mix and do what they had to do. I never met those guys and they could have been in Afghanistan. We made this good album together, but I never laid eyes on these

guys. It's a different world and the album isn't that bad, but it's not that same feeling of walking into a studio with a series of musicians and coming out with something you're excited about.

**Vinyl records have made a big comeback and “Whipped Cream and Other Delights” is in demand on vinyl. Is music a better experience on vinyl?**

The average person is so conditioned to wanting things quickly because of the TV and 24-hour news, they don't listen to music like they're capable of listening. They judge too quickly. If you're listening to someone who has something serious to say musically, you can't put on 10 or 20 seconds of it and make a judgment. You need to spend time analyzing, listening and feeling what the person is trying to communicate. But if you're impatient and don't have that ability, it's a different world. We don't seem to have the patience required to listen to great artists anymore.

**You've donated a lot of money to music education. Do you feel music is still a good career path?**

(laughs) You have to be lucky. The timing has to be in your corner, but unless you're really passionate about being a musician, don't even try it. There are so many great musicians around the world struggling to make ends meet to keep their passion alive. We have to get back into the education of these young kids coming up where they can appreciate classical, jazz and all the different genres and where they come from. Jazz is one of the unique art forms of all time that has come out of the United States that is, in my opinion, overlooked because it's all about freedom and that's what we're looking for all around the world. We want to be ourselves and the people we're intended to be. Jazz expresses that feeling. To appreciate it, you have to understand the roots.



Herb Alpert and collection of his totem pole sculptures. (Photo: Courtesy of Sunnylnds)

**How can we keep jazz alive?**

It's going to take education. We have to make sure it's not just a privilege to have an education with music and the arts for kids at an early age, but it should be a right for them to have that.

**As the owner of Vibrato Jazz Grill in Los Angeles, what makes for a good jazz club atmosphere?**

First, it has to be acoustically beautiful. It needs to represent the sound coming from the stage. The environment, the colors, the feeling of walking into a place and feeling comfortable is a good start. I've been into a lot of clubs and just by the feeling of it, you don't think it's going to be good, but the sound might be good. If you can combine a good feeling in a club with acoustically beautiful sound, that would be a great combination.

## If you go

**What:** Herb Alpert and Lani Hall

**When:** 7 p.m., Jan. 27

**Where:** McCallum Theatre, 73-000 Fred Waring Dr., Palm Desert

**How much:** \$35-\$55

**Information:** (760) 340-2787