

Herb Alpert, Lani Hall bring a taste of honey to Bend

Tijuana Brass trumpeter, Brasil '66 singer team up at Tower

By Brian McElhiney
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Trumpeter Herb Alpert and vocalist Lani Hall will perform at the Tower Theatre on Thursday. The duo, married since the '70s, will perform material from their respective bands Tijuana Brass and Brasil '66, along with new material. (Dewey Nicks/Submitted photo)



Former Tijuana Brass leader and A&M Records co-founder Herb Alpert will perform with his wife, Latin jazz vocalist Lani Hall, at the Tower Theatre on Thursday. (Nick Spanos/Submitted photo)

There is no separating Herb Alpert from his trumpet.

That became clear about halfway through recent a phone interview with GO! Magazine ahead of Alpert's show with his wife, Latin jazz singer Lani Hall, at the Tower Theatre on Thursday. As the former Tijuana Brass leader described his love of improvisation, he paused and blew a short burst of cascading notes from his horn

"The beauty part of music is" this is really fascinating, and just the last year, I've been talking about it 'cause it's really a knockout," Alpert said from his home in Malibu, California. "It's the idea that there's only 12 notes in the Western lexicon. That's all we have are 12 notes Mozart had those notes, Beethoven had those notes, Thelonious Monk had those notes, Charlie Parker had those you know what I'm saying? There's so many different ways to interpret those 12 notes, not to mention the amount of rhythms and nuances that you can do with those 12 notes. It's fascinating."

Even at 83, Alpert finds music and art in general mysterious.

"When you hear a song on the radio and it gives you goosebumps and you love it, you can't identify what it is about it," he said. "I mean, you can say, ~Well, I like the rhythm." OK, so now what? ~Well, the melody's beautiful." You can't get down to the nub of what art is all about, and I think if you think

too hard about it, you'll miss it. It's like standing in front of a Jackson Pollock painting and saying, "What the hell is he up to? If you don't think about it and just feel it, you'll get it. Maybe."

Spontaneity is a big part of what has kept Alpert on the road with Hall since 2007, when the couple assembled the band they still play with and began touring together. They perform about 50 shows per year.

Sets include medleys of Tijuana Brass tunes and Brasil '66 songs. (Hall launched her career in Sergio Mendes' Bossa nova group before launching a solo career in the '70s, with Alpert as producer.) This particular run also will feature video footage from those bands' heydays projected on screen during the medleys.

But as his earlier comments make clear, Alpert most looks forward to stretching out with improvisation and new material in the shows. That's what got him back on the road again in the first place, after a quiet period in the early 2000s.

"I was a little reluctant to even start touring, to tell you the truth," Alpert said. "I was afraid people just wanted to hear the Tijuana Brass, and they would throw tomatoes at us or something if they didn't hear it. And so the first concert we did was in San Diego, and I didn't play any Tijuana Brass songs, and everyone seemed to have a great time. So I got inspired by that, and then little by little, we started adding them into the show."

In addition to live performance, Alpert has been on a recording tear since those early shows with Hall were documented on the 2009 live album 'Anything Goes.' Alpert's first album of new material in close to a decade, 'Anything Goes' was followed by two studio albums with Hall and six more solo studio albums, most recently last year's 'Music Volume 1' and 'The Christmas Wish.'

But that's a bit deceiving, as Alpert co-founder, with Jerry Moss, of the independent juggernaut A&M Records" has always recorded, even if he doesn't release the material. He was an accomplished producer and songwriter when he recorded the first Tijuana Brass album, 1962's "The Lonely Bull."

Initially inspired by mariachi music, Alpert would focus on instrumental arrangements of popular songs on subsequent Tijuana Brass recordings, reaching a peak with 1965's "Whipped Cream & Other Delights" album. Following that release, the Tijuana Brass became an actual band (previous albums featured Alpert overdubbing trumpet lines and backed by Los Angeles session musicians).

"I think music and art is all about a feel, and I wanted that certain feel," Alpert said. "I could get that feel through my horn, and when I tried to add another horn to that with me, it just never felt the way I wanted to hear it. I was very particular on the sound I wanted to strive for."

His next album, "Music Volume 3: Herb Alpert Reimagines the Tijuana Brass," due out Oct. 19, will feature new versions of such Tijuana Brass hits as "Spanish Flea" (in a medley with Alpert's 1979 solo hit "Rise"), "A Taste of Honey" and "Wade in the Water," many inspired by the arrangements Alpert, Hall and the band play on tour. (Alpert didn't forget about "Music Volume 2" that album, which features collaborations with Hall, is in progress, he said.)

"I started fooling around with a couple of the old songs, and I found I was having a good time doing it," he said. "My process has always been, if I can have fun playing a song, it might be fun for some other people to listen to."