

Herb Alpert and Lani Hall just want you to be happy

The famed trumpeter tours with his soulmate and a new dance album

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At age 81, with so much money he can give it away in seven-digit chunks, Herb Alpert doesn't have to tour. He could stay home and noodle around in his studio, sculpt wax, slather coffee (his current favorite medium) on canvas and hang with his talented soulmate and musical collaborator Lani Hall.

Alpert has already sold some 72 million records, racked up nine Grammys, been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and been awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Obama. Hall, a vocalist, best known for her work with Sergio Mendes & Brasil '66 and for the theme from the 1983 James Bond flick *Never Say Never Again*, has a couple Grammys of her own. Performers half Alpert's age find touring an unbearable grind and would happily give it up if they could. So why do it?

“People leave our concerts feeling better than when they entered, so that's a really great feeling for me,” Alpert says. “And I'm not compromising; I'm making the music I like to make.”

Fair enough. People will be leaving the Stoughton Opera House feeling better than when they entered on Oct. 14, when Alpert and Hall bring their act to town as part of a Midwestern swing to promote Alpert's new album, *Human Nature*.

The album is a mix of originals and covers, mostly instrumentals but with a couple of cuts that feature Hall's vocals. Among the covers, the title track. Alpert's take on the Michael Jackson hit stands out, as does his rendition of the Burt Bacharach classic “Alfie” In my estimation, one of the originals, “Shake It,” has radio hit written all over it, but that's not the one being plugged as the featured single. That honor goes to another original, “Doodles.” But Herb agrees with me about “Shake It.”

“Shake It” was the one I thought was gonna be the one too,” he says. “But you never know; the public tells you. When I had A&M Records and I'd hear a side that one of our artists made, and I thought “Man, that's a hit record if I ever heard one,” and I'd go into the promotion department and play

it for them, and they're staring out the window. The truth of it all is that nobody knows what's gonna be a hit."



Hall and Alpert in 1986 after Hall won the Grammy for Best Latin Pop Performance.

While there are a few ballads mixed in, *Human Nature* is really an electronic dance album, featuring several cuts with peppy, percussive underpinnings. Alpert says he didn't initially set out to make a rump-shaker. It just kind of happened.

"A few of my musician friends presented me with these rhythms and grooves that I just felt good about, and I started playing the trumpet over the top of it and having a good time; one thing led to another, and I recorded," Alpert says. Alpert is no stranger to dance music, of course. "Rise" was a monster hit, riding an infectious groove and hummable trumpet melody to the top of the charts back in 1979.

Most people know Alpert best from his string of '60s hits with the Tijuana Brass, including such classics as "The Lonely Bull," "A Taste of Honey" and "This Guy's in Love With You." While he was never the hottest trumpeter around, his style is unmistakable. But Alpert's mark on the music business has at least as much to do with his role as record label mogul as it does with his chops and compositions. Alpert was the "A" in A&M Records, which he founded in his garage with partner Jerry Moss in 1962. A&M was home to such hitmakers as the Carpenters, Peter Frampton, the Police, Janet Jackson and many others. Alpert and Moss sold the label to Polygram for half a billion dollars in 1989, cashing out in time to avoid the devastation that downloading and file-sharing have inflicted on the record business.

In addition to *Human Nature*, Alpert also released remastered versions of 24 of his classic albums in September. He didn't have to do it. He doesn't need the money, and it's not hard to find those albums on vinyl at used record stores. So why bother?

"A lot of those records were not released internationally," says Alpert. "And then I started seeing on Amazon and some of the other websites they were bootlegging my albums from different parts of the world and selling them for like \$100 for a CD. So I said, hey, let's just make some new legal ones."

In addition to material from *Human Nature*, the Stoughton show will likely include the expected Tijuana Brass medley, a Brasil '66 medley, some standards (including a few he recorded on last year's album, *Come Fly With Me*), and other odds and ends from Alpert's and Hall's storied careers.

These days, Alpert spends as much time on visual art as he does on music, and his stuff is good enough to be on display in galleries and museums all over the place, including a batch of his bronze Spirit Totems that were exhibited at the Field Museum in Chicago for the past year.

Alpert's other passion, along with music and art, is philanthropy. He's given millions of dollars to support music education. Through his Herb Alpert Foundation, he has endowed two music schools, one at UCLA and another at California Institute of the Arts. In August, the foundation donated \$10.1 million to Los Angeles City College's Music Department to provide free attendance and additional private lessons for music majors there.

At an age when most musicians have traded in their ax for a rocking chair, Alpert has no plans to stop performing any time soon.

"I've spent my musical career trying to make music that's uplifting," Alpert says. "I'm not interested in downer music. I wanna make music that makes you feel good, and makes *me* feel good to play it. I always felt that if it's fun for me to play, it'll be fun for someone else to listen to."