

Herb Alpert Is Back With His First Christmas Album in Five Decades

LAMBETH HOCHWALD PARADE December 5, 2017



The beloved trumpeter, Herb Alpert, has a new album out and it's already landed Alpert at No. 1 on Billboard's Contemporary Jazz Chart for the second time this year. The Christmas Wish marks Alpert's return to holiday music for the first time in five decades and features Alpert and a 77-piece symphony and choir lending fresh takes on such holiday hits as "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" and "Let it Snow." We sat down with this music legend to talk about what he loves about the holidays, where he'll be celebrating and why he wants youngsters to catch the arts bug.

Why do we love Christmas music so much?

I think it's uplifting, it's light, it's joyous and we can all use a little bit more of that in this country at this moment.

Do you have a favorite Christmas song?

I only choose the ones I like to play. I feel like if it's fun for me to play, it will be fun for people to listen to it. Those are the ones I choose. I eliminate the ones that aren't fun for me.

How did the album come together?

I did an album with the Tijuana brass in 1967 and it was on my bucket list that if I got a chance to do another Christmas album I'd like to do it with an orchestra and choir. That's how that came about!

It must have been incredible to record with an orchestra.

It's amazing. You think of an orchestra as made up of old-timers, but it's not. It's filled with young energy, whether the musicians are young or old. It wasn't a bunch of old geezers playing in an orchestra. It's energizing playing with good musicians.

How do you celebrate the holiday season?

I'm usually in Hawaii. We have a few nights of concerts at the Blue Note in Honolulu in the middle of the month. My wife and I have been married 44 years and our anniversary is on the 16th of December so we celebrate that and the holidays. You see all these beautiful ornaments and lights everywhere. It's a fun time.

I read about your foundation that provides tuition-free education to LA students eager to attend community college. **Can you tell me more?**

These scholarships are for kids who wouldn't have a chance to go to a university, even a city college. Most people donate to the big universities like Harvard, Yale and UCLA, but our foundation focuses on giving kids a chance to see if they can handle a community college education and then they can transition into a university of their choice. Of all the things I've contributed to this is the one that really really struck home. It touches so many people who would have never had a chance to go to college. I want to stress that. Donating to community colleges has been overlooked but this has helped so many kids. I think it's something that people who have the funds could or should look into.

It was at elementary school that you discovered the trumpet, yes?

I'm from Los Angeles and I took a music appreciation class when I was 8 years old. There was a table filled with instruments and I happened to pick up the trumpet because it fit my hand. I was short and I'm an introvert. Once I started making sounds on the trumpet I felt like it was talking for me. It changed my [life](#). I feel that kids should have that kind of creative experience at an early age. It's crucially important. They don't have to play an instrument, but they can dance, sculpt, paint, write poetry—whatever fulfills their creative needs. If they stick to it and they get satisfaction from it they can appreciate their own uniqueness. If they can appreciate their own uniqueness, hopefully they can appreciate the uniqueness in others. We could use a lot more of that these days.

So do you think you will make another holiday album some day?

I mentioned that exact thing to my wife the other day and she said 'are you joking?' I love to play the horn, I love to record, we've been playing for sold-out crowds and we're making so many people happy with the music. It's something that really gives me a huge amount of pleasure.