

HAS YOUR PRACTICING EVER CAUSED A PROBLEM WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS? (SEE PAGE 14)

WINDPLAYER

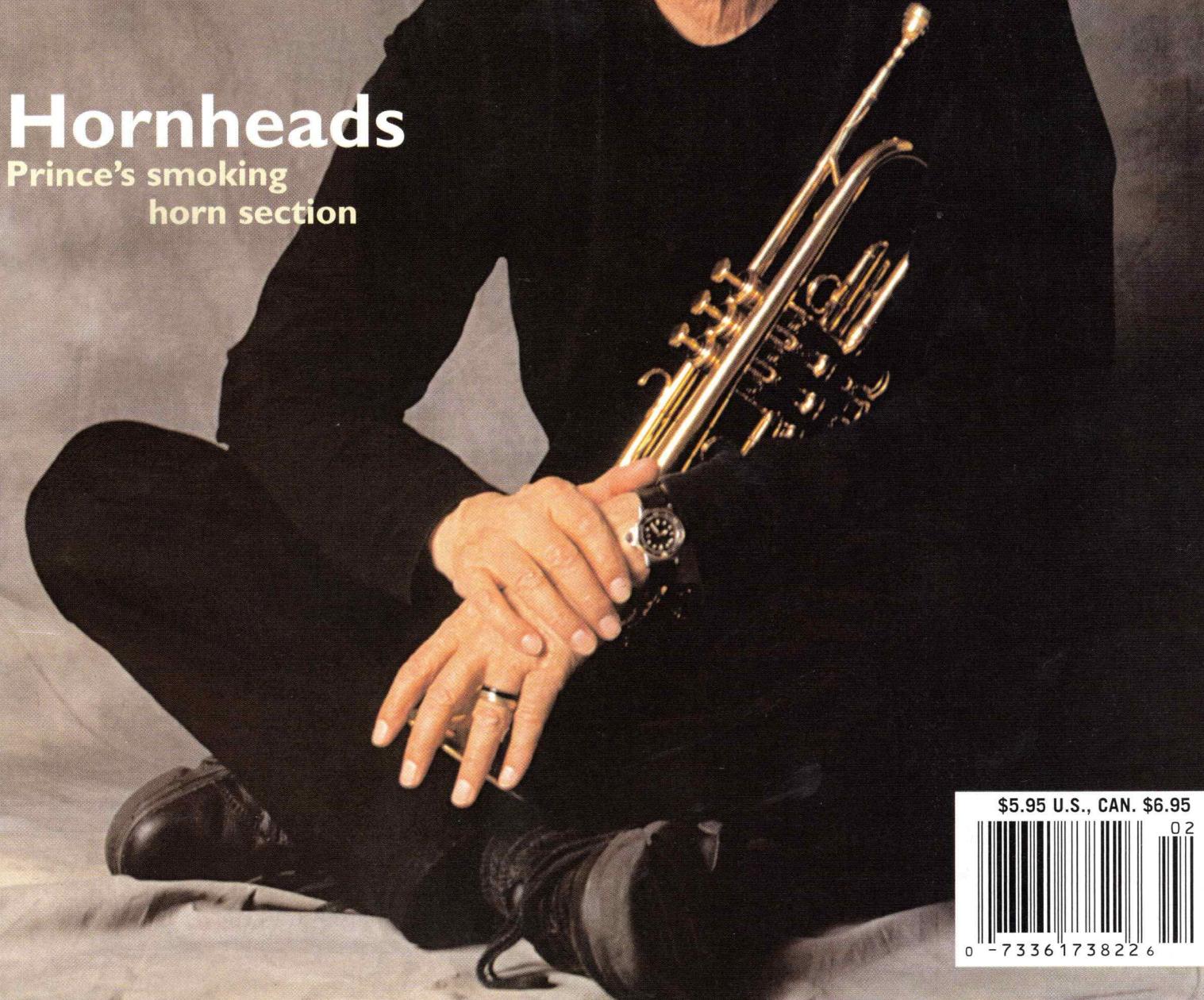
FOR WOODWIND AND BRASS MUSICIANS
NO. 64

Herb Alpert

Finds refuge
in his trumpet

Hornheads

Prince's smoking
horn section



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Herb Alpert



By Irving Bush and Susan Bliss

A shy child who found refuge in the trumpet became one of the most heard wind musicians in history. A string of gold albums and a successful entrepreneurial career have made Herb Alpert a household name.

Herb Alpert has been a household name ever since his *Lonely Bull* album burst on the scene in 1962. Known for decades as the leader of the Tijuana Brass and cofounder, with Jerry Moss, of A&M Records, Alpert still rises at 6 a.m. everyday, paints and sculpts for a few hours, then practices trumpet. His wild success as a performer and entrepreneur—including the younger label, Almo Sounds—has been well documented. Here, he discusses the history of his development as a trumpeter, from his childhood introduction to the instrument to the musicians that influenced him.

"At the age of 8, my class in school was shown many musical instruments: strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. We were allowed to handle the instruments. I finally picked up a trumpet and blew air through it. Nothing came out but I liked the feel of holding the horn. I was allowed to take it home, and it took awhile to figure out that it took more than blowing air through the trumpet to get a sound. Shortly after, I started taking lessons."

By his own account, Alpert was a shy child who found refuge in trumpet playing, a safe way to make noise and to express himself. His teachers recognized the boy's potential and the student learned from their strengths. "My first teacher's name was Marino. I don't remember his first name. He was soft-spoken and mild mannered. I studied with him for about a year. I then studied with Ben Klatzkin. I took lessons on and off for quite some time. He took me through the Arban book... taught me how to double-tongue and other related techniques. He also had me put my hand on his stomach in order to tell where the air was coming from. He was an intuitive person. I played something for him one day and he acted very emotionally. I must have really moved him."

After Klatzkin, Alpert worked with Harold "Pappy" Mitchell. He found his new instructor somewhat eccentric, a memorable storyteller and an illuminating taskmaster. "He was a tough disciplinarian. He mentioned about going to the candy store and he said to take the candy you want, but you have to work for it. Practice and you will earn the candy. Nothing is free. If Pappy thought my horn was dirty, we would clean it before the lesson started."

Alpert then moved to Lou Mitchell (no relation to Pappy), who held weekly trumpet section rehearsals that taught his young student the value of listening. Alpert also tried Mannie Klein, but abandoned the relationship after Klein said, "You don't need lessons. Just practice what you want." Of course other instructors didn't agree with that assessment. "I also took a few lessons from John Clyman. One day he had me play something from Arban. He said, 'It sounds like a "chick" playing the trumpet.' He then played the same exercise. John was a powerful player and always seemed to have both feet nailed to the floor."

The evolving trumpeter attended Fairfax High School, in Los Angeles, and spent a year and a half at USC before two broadening years in the military. "My first

than I could. I was still searching for my own identity as a trumpet player. After the band school, I was stationed at the Presidio of San Francisco... I became the solo trumpet with that band, a great experience for me. While at the Presidio, I really started listening to jazz, especially other trumpet players, everything from Louis Armstrong to Clifford Brown."

This exposure was followed by a period as a struggling free-lancer, during which time Alpert linked up with various bands to play wedding receptions and parties, while he worked as a songwriter and record producer for a local company. Then the garage-production of *Lonely Bull* changed his life. "That was the beginning. I think the record-buying public was ready for an instrumental with solo trumpet. It caught on like you wouldn't believe. We formed our record company [A&M]. We made other albums, played hundreds of concerts all over the world. It was incredible."

But at the height of his success, something changed about his ease with the instrument. "In 1969, all of a sudden, playing the trumpet became very difficult... It also became very difficult to express myself through the horn. Until then, the trumpet was a great friend, a

great barometer. If you were happy, the sound and notes would come out that way..."

Alpert struggled with the problem for quite awhile until he met well-known teacher Carmine Caruso, in New York. "We became quick friends and I finally made an appointment with him. Carmine asked me to play. It was

agonizing. Pure torture. I then asked Carmine what he thought was wrong. Carmine said, 'even if I told you, it wouldn't help. You gotta work your way

out of it.' One time in New York, Carmine came up to our apartment at the Sherry Netherlands. He had a few drinks and several hours later Carmine was slightly stoned. Finally, I asked what I was doing wrong. In a slurred voice he said, 'You're trying to play with your mouth

"I could play loud high Gs, but it didn't give me any satisfaction. I decided to back off the pedal and play music that would give me more of a feeling of accomplishment. I decided to make music in a different fashion."

open.' Obviously my lips were too far apart. Carmine gave me exercises and calisthenics to work on. He compared playing the trumpet to being an athlete. This had nothing to do with music. It had to do with the physical aspect of playing the trumpet."

Following Caruso's advice, Alpert straightened himself out, though it took about four years before he felt completely comfortable playing again. He fondly reminisces about Caruso's no-nonsense approach. "Carmine made it clear that every time I got into trouble it wasn't necessary to change my embouchure, change mouthpieces, leadpipes or horns, etc... [He] said when you go higher your lips go faster, when you play lower your lips go slower. Next?"

In line with that philosophy, Alpert reflected on the counterproductive gyrations to which some trumpeters submit themselves. "I also studied with Lou Maggio, [who was] super physical. He had a picture of a chimpanzee on the wall behind his chair, I guess to display what sort of abuse a trumpet player goes through with his chops. That was a period when I didn't want to play loud and high. I could play loud high Gs, but

EQUIPMENT PREFERENCES

While Alpert has owned many horns throughout his career, his favorite is a Chicago Benge built around 1951. Alpert refers to this trumpet "mellow and melodic." It is also the horn he has used on all of his recordings, used with a Bach 8B cup mouthpiece with Reeves backbore. He switches between a Couesnon and a copper bell Kanstul flugelhorn. His microphone is a wireless made by SD systems. Alpert uses both Al Cass and the new Bob Reeves valve oils.

army experience was the U.S. Army Band at Fort Knox, Kentucky. There were so many excellent trumpet players there. Some could play higher, louder and faster



All that Glitters

According to figures provided by the Recording Industry of America, Alpert's illustrious recording career has yielded the following awards for sales (listed by date of RIAA certification).

Gold (all for albums made as leader of the Tijuana Brass, unless otherwise noted):

12/15/65
Going Places
Whipped Cream and Other Delights

5/9/66
Herb Alpert's Tijuana Brass, Volume 2
The Lonely Bull
South of the Border
What Now My Love

1/19/67
S.R.O.

8/25/67
Sounds Like

12/8/67
Herb Alpert's Ninth

7/19/68
The Beat of the Brass
This Guy's In Love With You
(single)

12/16/68
The Christmas Album

3/26/70

Warm

4/12/71

Greatest Hits

9/25/79

Rise

(Herb Alpert solo; single)

2/5/80

Rise

(Herb Alpert solo; single)

6/17/87

Keep Your Eye on Me

(Herb Alpert solo)

Platinum:

2/5/80

Rise

(Herb Alpert solo)

it didn't give me any satisfaction. I decided to back off the pedal and play music that would give me more of a feeling of accomplishment. My teeth were getting loose and it didn't mean a thing. I decided to make music in a different fashion."

In the beginning years of his career, Alpert had already decided that jazz was going to be the correct outlet for him. "Playing music written by someone else didn't allow me to really express myself." Asked if he thinks of chords when improvising, Alpert replies, "Well first I have to know the structure of the song. Then I think of chords, modes or whatever. I am more into modal jazz. I am not interested in changing chords every beat or two, like bebop jazz. To me, that's like going through a minefield. Some people do it great, but it's not relaxing for me to do that although I appreciate it when I listen to bebop being played."

Jazz has provided a lifetime of personal communication as well as an ongoing education. "When I talk to a musician whose playing I respect, I pick their brain to find their approach to music. Almost everyone has a different take on how they go about it... I still try to improve my jazz and keep abreast of what's going on in the jazz world." Working toward a definition of that world, Alpert says, "If a person plays music that is honest, with good feeling and a good rhythmic sense, that's what is important. Also when you get on the tightrope, don't plan it too much. I think that's what most jazzers have in common. I think of Miles Davis as the seminal jazz trumpet musician. He had the whole thing. He had a good melodic sense, good space, good time and could rip it off when he wanted to, but he didn't force anything. Everything came out naturally. Except when you are playing classical music where you don't have the [leeway], you are playing jazz of some sort no matter what the style is... [Early on,] I started resonating with that concept of playing. It gave me that freedom which I believe we are all looking for." ●