

You Smile the Song Begins

Herb Alpert and his Tijuana Brass provided an appropriately lightweight accompaniment to a relatively carefree span of years. The TJB's frothy, antic sound was the whipped cream in our not-yet-bitter Sixties espresso. Alpert's several-year absence as a performer enforced a notion that if he were to play publicly again whatever music he made would sound frivolous and dated.

You Smile... then is a delight and a particular surprise. Aided by friendly associates like Burt Bacharach and Quincy Jones, Herb Alpert has arranged and produced a significant musical return. It represents an impressive maturity of an artist who not only has more to tell but has found a lovely new language in which to speak, soft and sinuous, exotic and sophisticated, tantalizing, open, elusive.

"Fox Hunt" is the perfect beginning, a serpentine self-composition with some of the feel of "Zorba" that skips along over a delicate marimba underpinning. It is followed by Chuck Mangione's "Legend of the One-Eyed Sailor", which swells from introspective to urgent carnival revelry and back; in the subdued sections, Alpert's conjures a mood much like one of Miles Davis's Sketches of Spain.

A masterful use of dynamics is demonstrated throughout this album. One track will end precisely but informally, creating anticipation for the next, a melody separate yet seeming an extension of the previous. Deft and subtle colorations distinguish every song, spare effects used only once: here a measure of trombone, there a splash of acoustic guitar, now a restrained trio of overdubbed horns. No one instrument is allowed to dominate the shifting rhythms, not even trumpet, which constantly varies its sound and setting even within each tune.

The Bacharach/David ballad "I Might Frighten Her Away" is romantic without being simple-minded, as haunting as it is dreamy. The title tune is an appropriate bridge between "Frighten" and Julius Wechter's "Up Cherry Street," the single cut--significantly brief --which comes close to the old TJB boisterousness.

"Promises, Promises" is witty, with off-mike scattling that lends a rehearsal atmosphere, an aspect of the prepared informality that gives this album a charming personal feel. Lani Hall does a duet with Herb on "Save the Sunlight", where Alpert's playing is most pure and bell-like.

Roger Nichol's "Song for Herb" is the floating fadeout, a four-minute descent from the empyrean on a soft mauve cloud.

Tom Nolan, Rolling Stone, August 29, 1974