

Herb Alpert: Trumpeting his life

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As an 8-year-old, Herb Alpert picked up a trumpet for the first time, and 65 years later, there's hardly been a day when he hasn't had the brass instrument in his hands.

"I just loved the sound. I was a very shy and the trumpet would do the talking for me; it was my voice," Alpert says. "I got a lot of positive feedback once I understood how to play the instrument. I practice every day, whether I am recording or not and I really enjoy it. It's just part of me."

In high school, Alpert and some friends entered a musical talent battle on TV (think a 1950s version of "American Idol" but with instruments), and were victorious for eight-straight weeks. That led to the band playing parties and weddings and Alpert realizing he could make a reasonable living at playing the trumpet.

And that's just what he has done. Known for his legendary leadership of Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass and his producing of some of the top artists in the music industry, Alpert has sold more than 75 million albums, has won eight Grammy's and is the "A" of A&M Records.

Alpert created a plethora of hits through the years, most notably "The Lonely Bull," which was his musical interpretation of a bull fight he had witnessed in Tijuana and was responsible for the origin of the Tijuana Brass.

In recent years, Alpert has devoted more of his time to painting and sculpting and moved away from the recording industry. In fact, it looked like this decade would be the first where he didn't record new material in 50 years. But his wife, accomplished vocalist Lani Hall, had an idea for a small group with the two of them and a backing trio.

μThe result was a 2009 summer release "Anything Goes," which were new arrangements of old hits, such as "Fascinating Rhythm" and "That Old Black Magic."

"We decided to see if we could take known American standards and do them in a way that they haven't been heard before," Alpert says. "Plus we added some songs in Portuguese because my wife is a fabulous singer in that language. The combination appears to be magic."

Alpert and Hall are currently touring to support the new recording and will be appearing at the Ridgefield Playhouse on Nov. 2.

"I just wanted to play small jazz clubs in intimate settings with the audience so close, but we found it would be better to move to smaller theaters, which we could still have a good time and have an intimate experience," Alpert says. "It's not the Tijuana Brass. I was reluctant at first to do these concerts. I thought people would yell out for me to play 'Lonely Bull' or 'Tijuana Taxi' but that hasn't happened and it's been a real gratifying experience for me."

Alpert admits that he doesn't really miss playing those songs, but he does appreciate them and is thankful for them.

"This is a new day," he says. "When we are on stage, even though there are arrangements, everything that happens is pretty much impromptu, which keeps it really exciting for me. Every night, each song sounds a little bit different and it keeps it fun."

Alpert says he and his wife complement each other perfectly, although they do differ on the opinion of what makes a good song.

"She says a good song is a great lyric, I say a good song is a great melody with a good lyric," he explains. "I pick out songs with memorable melodies and good lyrics and I think that combination appeals to most people. Something about a song that is memorable and worth listening to if done in the right way is really engaging."

The tour is expected to run through the end of the year and Alpert doesn't see any reason why the two of them won't continue playing in the years ahead.

"The reaction from the audience has been sensational. They have a great time listening to us and I think they get a lot from it," Alpert says. "It may sound corny, but I know we are making a lot of people happy and at my age, I get energy from doing this. I am just happy and lucky I am able to still do this."