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In concert: Herb Alpert at the Birchmere

By John Murph



Love was in the air when Alpert and wife Lani Hall performed at the Birchmere on Wednesday. (All photos by Josh Sisk/FTWP)

The Birchmere extended Valentine's Day on Wednesday night as veteran trumpeter Herb Alpert and his wife, vocalist Lani Hall, beguiled a packed house with a set of amorous classics. As the two culled much from their recently released disc, "I Feel You" and its 2009 predecessor, "Anything Goes," the sold-out concert attested to their encyclopedic knowledge of music, ranging from American standards to Brazilian pop and to their brilliance at refurbishing songs with bracing emotional pull and savvy musicianship.

Given that they've been married since 1974, and the incredible musical accord they exhibited, it's peculiar that they hadn't really toured together until 2007. Nevertheless, a simpatico between the two was undeniable.



Complemented by their highly versatile band - pianist Bill Cantos, bassist Hussain Jiffry, and drummer and percussionist Michael Shapiro - Alpert and Hall balanced jazz-inspired reflexes with pop showmanship that played to both of their strengths. Hall, who spent five years singing lead for Sergio Mendes' Brasil '66, sparkled on such Brazilian pop classics as Jose Carlos Capinan and Edu Lobo's "Viola (Viola For a de Moda), Baden Powell and Vinicius De Moraes' "Berminbau" with her infallible sense of rhythm, impeccable diction and flickering sensuality. Her rich alto also soared on American gems such as Van Morrison's "Moondance" and Irving Berlin's "Let's Face the Music and Dance" and Peggy Lee's megahit, "Fever."

While Alpert has never marketed himself as a bona fide jazz trumpeter, he nevertheless exhibited jazz intuitions. As a trumpeter, he kept his melodic phrases economical but embellished them with subtle improvisational runs. When he plugged his horn with a Harmon mute, his playing recalled Miles Davis. Other times, Alpert infused a flamenco flare that certainly served him well as they revisited a batch of Tijuana Brass hits such as "A Taste of Honey," "Whipped Cream," and his late-'70s R&B-disco hit, "Rise."

For all of Alpert and Hall's amicable repartee with the enthusiastic audience and their established individual legacies, it's also a testament to their elegance that they never tried to oversell their performances with embarrassing nods to hip-hop, callow virtuosity or cringe-inducing "lovers on stage" antics. They brought a genuine love and classiness to the material, which in turn, set the romantic mood at the Birchmere.

