

HERB ALPERT

When it comes to the art of creativity, and when it comes to creating music, few people are as attuned and sensitive to the subtleties of the art as Herb Alpert.

Today, Herb Alpert maintains a dual-identity as a creative and progressive musician, producer and composer, as well as being Vice-Chairman of A & M Records, which he co-founded with its Chairman, Jerry Moss.

A & M Records just iced their 15th anniversary, marking their growth as the most successful independently distributed record company in the world, as well as saluting a decade of music that was strongly influenced by the charisma and magic of the Herb Alpert sound.

The anniversary theme, "15 Years: We've Only Just Begun," not only sets the tone for the future, but in essence reflects a second musical phase for Alpert, who has just completed one of his most adventurous projects to date, a blood and guts duet album with friend and South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela.

The album, *Herb Alpert & Hugh Masekela*, is the heart and soul of Alpert and Masekela, and the fusion itself has to be one of the most intriguing collaborations of musicians and styles to come down the pike in a long time.

Unpredictable, like the musicians themselves, the music exudes spontaneity, boundless energy, diversity and highbred emotion—and that vivid quality that is indicative of a unique style and sound.

Alpert has deceptively been easing into new musical areas in the past two years as producer of albums for A & M recording artists Letta Mbulu and Gato Barbieri. His work with Mbulu, Barbieri, and now Masekela, accent his own keen sense of improvisation and timing, his affection for afro-latin rhythms, and his ability to move freely and competently in a myriad of musical settings.

Alpert, a native of Los Angeles, and son of an immigrant Russian father and a Hungarian mother,

began playing the horn when he was eight. He spent part of his teens serving in the Army (1956) and then hustled as a songwriter in the late 50's with his partner, an insurance salesman named Lou Adler.

Alpert and Adler songs were first recorded by Sam Cooke. They also produced bubblegum records, including Jan & Dean's "Baby Talk," and even tried recording themselves with a cover recording of "Alley Oop," under the ghost of Dante & The Evergreens. Alpert later recorded solo for RCA under a second cover, Dore Alpert, after the two had parted amicably.

In those struggling times, Alpert had already established his own philosophy towards the record industry, particularly regarding record companies. "If I ever had a record company," he remembers saying, "I would definitely give more importance to the artist, because it centers around the artist."

It had to be an omen, because in 1961 he met a climbing West Coast promotional man named Jerry Moss, and the two shared the brain-storm of wanting to form a "little" record company. The company was christened A & M, for the obvious—and it's still making history.

Most people don't realize that A & M Records was launched initially as a result of a casual visit to Tijuana. And that an Alpert rendition of "Twinkle Star," (a proposed debut single), was changed during a bullfight and laced with a Latin-style backdrop. When the trip was over, "Twinkle Star" had become "The Lonely Bull," with an intro of crowd cheers and exuberance.

In August of 1964, "The Lonely Bull," became the debut single for the infant A & M label and Alpert—and the next result was sales over 700,000 copies—A & M Records were off and running—and so was Alpert & The Tijuana Brass.

The debut album, "The Lonely Bull," was released in December of the same year, and by 1965, the fourth Alpert & Tijuana Brass album had been released, "Whipped Cream & Other Delights."

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The Alpert sound had developed into gargantuan proportions. The single, "A Taste of Honey," off the just mentioned album, shot to number one in the summer of '65. With that impetus, the album produced sales of over 600,000.

Alpert & The Tijuana Brass probably reached their peak the following year when they accomplished a still unmatched coup of the Billboard best-selling album charts. In the landmark April 16 album charts, Alpert had cemented the #1, #3, #6, #14, and #17 positions, a record five albums in the Top 20.

Alpert soon turned his attention and concentration toward the burgeoning giant A & M was becoming. Following the impact of Woodstock and the decline of "acid-rock," a progressive rock sound developed, surging into the 70's, and at the forefront of that transition were a number of A & M discoveries, including Cat Stevens, Fairport Convention, Quincy Jones, Free, Spooky Tooth, Karen & Richard Carpenter, Paul Williams. Quincy Jones' first album, *Walking In Space*, won a Grammy Award.

And today, A & M still retains a unique and successful roster of artists from Peter Frampton, The Carpenters, Quincy Jones, Billy Preston, to recent hit-makers like Joan Armatrading, The Brothers

Johnson, Pablo Cruise, Captain & Tennille, Gino Vannelli, and many others.

The unpredictable character of Alpert had never subsided, and in 1974, he went back into the studio with the Tijuana Brass to record "The Legend Of The One-Eyed Sailor," a tune written by Chuck Mangione, which led to an album, *You Smile—The Song Begins*, a tour with the Brass, a follow-up album, *Coney Island*, in 1975, and Herb's first solo album, *Just You and Me*, in 1976.

The Barbieri and Mbulu albums channeled his resources back into producing, but only momentarily before pursuing the project with Masekela.

Instinctively, Alpert has always gravitated towards what comes naturally, and he remarked, "I don't believe that you can force anything to happen. You can't force music, or art, or a company to be successful. What you can do is create an environment for it to take place."

Now, with *Herb Alpert & Hugh Masakela*, Alpert once again broadens his musical horizons. Visceral, fun, superbly musical, the album is a fine representation of two great musicians.

Alpert. Masekela. Together. In more ways than one.

HUGH MASEKELA

Hugh Masekela was born in Whitbank, a small town about 100 miles east of Johannesburg in South Africa. His childhood was predicated by racial tension and foreign occupation of the very land he was raised on. Whitbank, the home of his grandmother and grandfather (a Scottish mining engineer) was taken over for its endowment in rich natural mineral resources. The Blacks who occupied the land were put in townships to serve the cities, and Masekela's family was placed in a township named Soweta.

Raised mostly by his grandmother, who operated a local drinking house, Hugh made his first attempt at piano lessons at the age of nine, after he had rejoined his parents in Johannesburg. His parents were avid music listeners, as Hugh revealed. "South Africa has always been a very active country musically; records and gramophones were always available."

Hugh's early musical influences were for the most part American, as much as African; "We grew up with American movies, from the Lone Ranger to Humphrey Bogart. I knew America through records and films.

"Louis Armstrong, Glen Miller, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Patti Page, the Andrews Sisters, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, that's what my parents used to listen to and I knew all of the lyrics to their songs."

Of course, although music was an integral part of the people, aspiring young musicians weren't exactly encouraged, laughs Hugh, "Johannesburg was a soccer town, and at that time, if you took piano lessons you were considered a sissy.

"It was either soccer, boxing or dance music, which you danced to but didn't play—so I went to high school to become a good soccer player."

His proficiency as a soccer player was well above-average, but his desire to play music took priority. His first trumpet was a contribution, given to him by a group of South African Liberals, who helped to encourage home-grown musical talent.

The head of the school was Father Huddleston. After Huddleston was expelled from South Africa by

the government for his political views, he passed through America and met Louis Armstrong and told him about Hugh's first band in South Africa. Satchmo responded by giving the Father a trumpet to send back to Hugh—the delivery of which became a major media event since Armstrong was a god in South Africa. Says Hugh, "My group played a kind of cool west coast African jazz and one of the guys in the group turned me on to Clifford Brown."

He later became a side man with Kippie Moeketsi (whom he calls the Charlie Parker of South Africa) along with Miriam Makeba in 'The King Kong Band.' He worked his way through a number of African groups (The Manhattan Brothers, the Skylarks), and later played with visiting foreigners June Christie, Bud Shank, Bob Cooper and Tony Scott.

Eventually, a friendship with John Dankworth and Cleo Laine led to a musical scholarship in England, and later an opportunity to visit the States.

Hugh first came to the States in 1964 through a scholarship set up by Harry Belafonte. "I came right after the Communist scare. Kennedy was campaigning, the Civil Rights Movement was active, Khrushchev was giving 10 hour speeches and beating his shoes on a U.N. podium—it was a big adjustment for me."

He worked for and did his first real recording with Belafonte and Miriam Makeba as an arranger and producer before forming his own group with fellow students Larry Willis (Blood, Sweat & Tears) and Henry Jenkins. He did his first album for Mercury Records in 1963 with Hugo Montenegro, and did his first solo album with producer Ed Townsend for the same label.

Hugh spent four years at the Manhattan School of Music and was in the company of a number of today's leading contemporaries including Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Donald Byrd and Larry Willis.

His first major recording hit came in the spring of 1965 with the release of his first MGM album, *The Americanization of Ooga-Booga*. At the time Hugh

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was living on a \$2,500 advance downtown in a loft in New York, he had just been through a divorce, and he recalls candidly, "I spread the money over a whole year. I just bought a lot of jeans."

The album started making some noise in Los Angeles and Hugh was invited to perform at the first Watts Summer Festival in 1966.

After receiving a great reception, he decided that things could be better for him in California and he sent for his closest friend and ex-Manhattan School of Music classmate, Stewart Levine.

Together they formed Chisa Records in the fall of 1966 and sent for Letta Mbulu and Caiphus Semenya who joined them in California.

After one album on Chisa entitled *The Emancipation of Hugh Masekela* they sold Chisa to Uni Records and Hugh's first record on Uni was "Grazing In The Grass" which sold over 4 million records worldwide.

Record company problems developed and Hugh's recording career stopped for a period during which time he became involved with the Jazz Crusaders.

Chisa was reformed in 1970 and the Crusaders along with Letta Mbulu and Masekela recorded a number of albums for Motown, which was distributing Chisa.

Finally, after being overly saturated by record

company pressures, Hugh went on a sabbatical to Africa where he began working with and producing young African talent. His return to the States brought with him new energies.

In 1977, Herb Alpert, whose Mexican-flavored music with the Tijuana Brass had helped inspire Hugh Masekela in his efforts to introduce African music to the American public, decided to do an album together.

Says Hugh, "*Herb Alpert & Hugh Masekela* has a very contemporary feel. It was influenced by an African urban beat and also heavily influenced by Brazilian music. It has a very happy feeling; that record's definitely gotta smile on it." His collaborative effort with Herb Alpert went swiftly and smoothly: "The greatest thing is that there's no sense of competition. We complemented each other and the result is a very warm album. The most fantastic thing I've learned from working with Herb is the ability to play and approach music with great economy. Where once I'd play 15,000 notes to get an idea across, I've learned from him how to do it in five. It's a thing I couldn't master for a long time; I always played in excess of myself. Herb's a fantastic musician, has a fantastic ear, and a fantastic power of concentration. There wasn't one moment of conflict, it was very low-key and nobody got in anybody's way. And I haven't laughed as much in a long time."

ALPERT & MASEKELA

Many people will think that a fusion between Herb Alpert and Hugh Masekela on record was a well-thought-out plan—devised to embellish Alpert's Latin rhythms and Masekela's African improvisation, and in turn, create a commercially identifiable and unique new sound.

Actually, the Alpert/Masekela collaboration occurred quite by accident; in fact, to be even more succinct, by mere coincidence. Forgetting, for the moment, the strange sequence of events that led up to the eventual recording of the "Herb Alpert & Hugh Masekela," album, in the final analysis, it is that element of surprise that helps to explain the high level of spontaneity and pureness that was ultimately achieved when the two trumpeters actually joined forces in the A & M studios.

Alpert confesses that he first met Masekela over five years ago, again, purely by chance in a recording studio. The two never established any communication until Herb, again, accidentally spoke to Hugh while trying to reach his friend, and Masekela's long-time producer and business associate, Stewart Levine.

Alpert eventually invited Hugh to his office, and later to his home. Herb recalls, "When I inadvertently spoke to Hugh that morning we just started talking, you know, just a pleasant conversation and not based on getting together—but how are you. That afternoon, I started thinking about the combination, called Hugh back, and invited him to come to the studio."

When the two finally decided to give it a try, explains Herb, "We were both somewhat turned on by the idea, but at the same time we didn't know it it would work out. We started rapping about playing together and decided to follow through and get a couple of songs, some musicians, and get into the studio."

Says Herb, "I had first become very intrigued with African music from producing Letta Mbulu's album. Her husband, Caiphus Semenya, had initially

brought me some tapes, and I worked with him writing and producing Letta's album."

Alpert admits that the music at first was foreign. "I had a false impression of what African music was all about. I thought it was rather simple and filled with repetitive 'bang-bangs' . . . but instead I found out that it was sophisticated and had intricate and adventuresome rhythms.

"I was really looking to develop a new form, a new sound, or rather, not so much new, but something that would excite me, so when I started working with Caiphus a whole new area opened up.

"We were looking for an environment, not exactly a song to song approach, but a setting that would create a mood we both felt strong about. Particularly because I feel instrumental music has to be very visual, and when someone listens to an instrumental, it has to take them somewhere."

Alpert cited that the intent was to "create a dialogue between two musicians. We didn't want it to be a contest, but two people wanting to express themselves and spinning off each other.

"I felt there was a meeting ground somewhere. We're both very spontaneous players, which always leads to the unknown. I guess I've always been a frustrated jazz musician and I just reached a point where I really wanted to explore that side of my talent, and meeting Hugh opened a new door for me."

In the end, the album, above all other things, sounds pure and natural, exactly the feeling that Alpert and Masekela were trying to capture. Says Alpert, "When sound is too manufactured you can hear the difference, but we had our ear on right from go. We didn't want to refine it to a point of being wonderful. We wanted to keep things as organic as possible."

For Alpert, the album represents an evolution of his own musical style and progress. The pureness and spontaneity in the music is something that he has sought since his first contemporary jazz work with Gato Barbieri, (*Caliente*).

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"In 1969, I totally lost interest in playing, and lost the ability to play. I had visions of putting my horn in the case . . . and just let it all become a memory.

"Then in '74 and '75, when I got the Tijuana Brass back together and did a few solo albums, I still was not totally excited, but I realized that playing music was really a part of me. A&M has always been an environment where I thought things could happen, that somewhere along the line, the timing was going to catch up with me, and things would fall into place naturally."

Alpert states that the Masekela project has revitalized his creativity and had an overwhelmingly positive impact on his own career. "I like the album a lot, and I see it as a huge stepping stone. I think if it is

valid for people musically, it's just the start of something. We were really just experimenting and exploring, so there are a number of directions we can pursue in the future."

Excitedly, Alpert remarked, "I really feel that I'm onto something, or better yet, let's say I got a lot of satisfaction out of working with Hugh. I really feel good about it and I can have egg all over my face and fall on my ass . . . but I'll get up and do something else and keep at it!"

The trumpeter, who is also Vice-Chairman of his co-founded A&M Records, admits that the true test must be the public's ear. "It's certainly a nice entre. It's the audience, the people who buy the records who will tell us whether or not it will make it."

MASEKELA & ALPERT

Five years ago, Herb Alpert and Hugh Masekela were little more than outright strangers—they had a fleeting acquaintance in the studios. On that premise alone, it seems rather remote that the two of them would ever record together, but then, who ever thought we would land on the moon?

Herb Alpert and Hugh Masekela on one album could never have happened five years ago, and admits Hugh, "Herb and I haven't really been out there for awhile, so the timing is right. We come from the same turbulent times—the Viet Nam War, Chicago riots, the Haight Ashbury drug life—it was all really crazy."

While Masekela has recorded four albums in the past five years for another label, Alpert has been busy recording and producing for his own A&M Records.

The fusion of Alpert's highly musical style and Masekela's free-form and improvisational music is not what one might expect, and as Hugh revealed, "When we began, we didn't start it as a novel. We rehearsed in Herbie's backyard, in a studio (built behind his Malibu home), on the beach on Sunday. And then we taped it, made it into some sheets, and then we called in some of the best musicians in town."

"We were looking to blow really, just to play together unpretentiously, and to find new vehicles to put in the flavors that would be advantageous to our abilities."

Actually, the two recording together is even more by chance than meets the eye. Herb had called long-time business associate and producer for Masekela, Stewart Levine. Levine was out, but Hugh was a house guest and picked up the phone. The conversation led to an invitation to Herb's home and the subsequent recording followed.

What is not a coincidence is that although Herb and Hugh have been strangers, they have not been far apart in their musical tastes. Alpert recently produced South African Letta Mbulu's album, (A&M) *There's Music In The Air*, which has the same energy

and vitality of Masekela's *The Boy's Doin' It*, and *Melody Maker*. Hugh himself admits that he started out of the African idiom, and many of his early tunes were American standards such as Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence," and "California Dreamin'."

"We knew we were compatible as players because we came from the same direction as far as recorded music is concerned. The first day we got the greatest tracks and we played as though we were playing live. We kept most of what we did original as far as our performances were concerned."

The album also represents somewhat of a reunion of musicians that Alpert and Masekela have used over the years for their own albums. Guitarist Lee Ritenour, bassist Chuck Domanico and drummer James Gadson lent their talents to the set along with vocalist Letta Mbulu, producer Stewart Levine, and composer Caiphus Semenya, also from South Africa.

Says Hugh, "The tracks for the album only took three days, but it was a great marriage. It was my first-ever duet album, but there were never any times when things were difficult. We would come in smiling everyday and we had a lot of laughs."

"Herb was really amazing; he has a fantastic ear, a sense of perfect harmony, time, and a beautiful way of working with people. He has great musical ability and a lot of feeling."

"The fortunate thing," he advises, "is that the music came out like we hoped it would. If we liked something we played it, whether it was a melody from Patagonia, from Bulgaria, the Congo or the lower east side."

Sometimes the best things in music are those the least calculated and produced—allowing room for the purity and spontaneity that accompanies that first creation of a sound, a rhythm or a song.

Says Hugh, "We just felt that we could luck up, so everything has been a bonus in the way it came out. We surprised ourselves, and I think that a lot of other people are going to be pleasantly surprised too."