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HERB ALPERT

"I like to think of music in terms of pictures," is how Herb Alpert puts it. "Particularly with the kind of music I play, instrumental music, you've got to create an atmosphere for people to listen in. I believe strongly in pictures."

Magic Man, Alpert's latest album, more than substantiates that belief. The music here may be the most evocative he's made yet — rich with color, alive with movement and suggestion. The project, the musician-producer's first full collaboration with co-producer Michael Stokes, is itself a refreshing illustration of the way Alpert works: following instinct.

"I like to spin off of people," Alpert says, explaining his working with Stokes, A&M's Director of Black Product/A&R (and producer of hits by Enchantment, Shirley Caesar, the Soul Searchers and others). "Michael and I had a couple of meetings, over artists and music in general. We just talked, and I played him some of the new songs I'd written. He shot out some very positive energy about them."

Just how well the exchange of energy and ideas went is obvious from one listen to the album's intriguing title theme (and first single). Guitarist Wah Wah Watson played Alpert a tune over the phone which, for one reason or another, wasn't entirely suitable. But Alpert "really fell for the bridge. The next day, Michael, Wah Wah and I went into the studio and spent eight hours taking that bridge and writing a song around it." The loping, lyrical melody, Alpert admits, "happened sort of backwards."

"Manhattan Melody," Alpert's near-R&B composition with Stokes and Michel Colombier, was written from a "rhythm groove. We had a rhythm with no melody. It was fun watching this grow into a beautiful song which has a completely improvisational tag ending.

"Ever since I recorded 'This Guy's In Love With You' I've had requests from people who wanted to hear me sing again. 'I Get It From You' is the first song I've heard in some time that I felt comfortable with as a vocalist.

"I go into making a record knowing what I don't want," reveals Alpert. "If a certain direction starts to feel good, I'll pursue it. If it doesn't, I let it go, and may come back to it. I've found the best songs are the ones that come back to haunt me." *Magic Man* has its share of such music — "This One's For Me," the simple, sensitive refrain Alpert begged composer Richard Kerr to complete; "Besame Mucho," the '40s standard from Alpert's earliest horn-playing days, and "You Smile, A Song Begins," one of the rare occasions when Alpert has "revisited" a previously recorded tune for the purpose of exploring it more fully.

Alpert sees the accomplishment of *Magic Man* in that "I've been able to put two art forms together: the making of a record from the producer's standpoint, and the making of a record from the standpoint of the artist." Understandably, he feels close to the album, finding it "warmer, maybe more mature" than its predecessor, *Beyond*, the adventurous followup to *Rise*.

Rise, his international best-selling LP and Grammy Award winning single from 1979, was merely the latest triumph of a career that had already accounted for record sales of more than 60 million. It began in 1962 when Alpert and Jerry Moss founded a "little" record company in West Hollywood. Two years later, "The Lonely Bull" launched Alpert's legendary Tijuana Brass and A&M Records' fortunes. In the next decade and a half, the company grew to become one of the world's largest independent labels and a powerful force in contemporary music.

Alpert has no trouble assessing his attitude toward *Magic Man*. He smiles as he likens it to the way he felt about the early Brass and about *Rise*.

"Back in the '60s, I almost felt guilty, the music seemed to come so easy. *Rise* felt easy too — there was a buzz about it right from the beginning. Some of those same qualities are back now.

"I'm always trying to hit the ball over the center field wall," he says. "That and trying to stretch myself as a musician. That's why I'm enthusiastic about what I'm doing right now. It feels real good again, real comfortable."

