

HERB ALPERT

"About a month before 'Rise' was released, I was travelling and had a cassette with me and I found myself listening to it for my own pleasure. That hasn't happened with something I've cut since the Tijuana Brass days," remembered Herb Alpert, sitting in his comfortably cluttered office at A&M Records in Los Angeles. This was Alpert's first inkling that 'Rise,' which has gone on to be a bigger hit than "The Lonely Bull" which launched his career, was going to be something special. But neither hits nor specialness are new to Herb Alpert's life.

In 1962, he and Jerry Moss started a "little" record company whose first offices were a garage in West Hollywood. In August of 1964, they released "The Lonely Bull." It sold over 700,000 copies and A&M Records was suddenly more than a hopeful logo. In the next decade and a half, it grew to become the world's largest independent record company. In its first years, the growth of the company paralleled the tremendous success of the Tijuana Brass. Alpert racked up an impressive string of hit singles and albums and in April of 1966 occupied #1, #3, #6, #14, and #17 on the national album charts, a landmark achievement of five albums in the Top Twenty that has never been equaled.

A native of Los Angeles, Alpert, the son of a Russian immigrant father and a Hungarian mother, began playing the horn when he was eight. After a stint in the Army, he hustled as a songwriter in the late fifties with his then partner, an insurance salesman named Lou Adler. Jerry Moss was the top independent promotion man in the country when he and Alpert first met in the early sixties. The company they formed was based on Alpert's philosophy toward the record industry. "If I ever have a record company," he remembers saying, "I would definitely give more importance to the artist because it all centers around the artist."

Through the seventies, Alpert has worn three hats, one as an artist, a second as producer and a third as Vice-Chairman of A&M. He recorded two albums with the reformed Tijuana Brass, *You Smile-The Song Begins* and *Coney Island*, a solo album, *Just You and Me*, and two albums with Hugh Masekela, *Herb Alpert & Hugh Masekela* and *Main Event*. As a producer, he's been involved with Michel Colombier, Letta Mbulu, Gato Barbieri and Lani Hall. His responsibilities at A&M, he says, consist of "not answering a lot of memos" but his daily presence is a gentle reminder of the company's "artist-oriented" roots. Herb Alpert is one of the main reasons that A&M, with its years of success, hundreds of employees and scores of artists on the roster, has maintained its reputation as a "little" record company.

"Rise" brings Alpert full circle. When a musician is in the studio, past success is irrelevant. All that exists is the present, this music in this moment, and no matter how many million records you have behind you, it is a moment that is never unaccompanied by some anxiousness. This is why Alpert says the success of 'Rise,' "gives me some confidence I'd lost. The competition is tough in the music business. Last year, 4200 albums were released in America. What's happened with 'Rise' gives me the freedom to explore again."

The song was written by Alpert's nephew, Randy Badazz, and Andy Armer. Alpert said his intention "was to go a little left of center." Although the record won instant acceptance in discotheques, it was not cut as a disco record. Its leisurely groove was thought to be too slow but Alpert's intuition told him that people would and could dance to it.

Alpert calls the album he subsequently recorded "a potpourri. I didn't set out to record eight more 'Rises.'" The creativity that made "Rise" such an event was spurred by the song's success and Alpert has made his freshest, liveliest album in years. It opens with "1980," a song inspired by a telephone call Alpert got one day from Don Ohlmeyer of NBC Sports. "He asked me to write a possible theme for the network's coverage of the 1980 Moscow Olympics and this track is my image of what the opening of the Olympics should sound like." The energetic songwriting of Randy Badazz and Andy Armer shows up again in "Rotation," an infectious syncopated track that frames Alpert's signature trumpet in a whole new way.

"Aranjuez (Mon Amour)" closes the album with a spirited, densely textured dance tune. "This was the B-Side of the 'Rise' single," Alpert said, "I didn't have anything ready except this. It was cut as an A-Side but I knew that 'Rise' was the track so, to prevent dj's from flipping it over, I cheated a little on the single mix of 'Aranjuez.' I didn't want it to stand out too much. I've remixed it for the album the way it was originally intended. The tune is originally a concerto for classical guitar that Miles Davis cut on his *Sketches of Spain* album. The Moroccan section in the middle was inspired by the music I heard at a dinner in a Middle Eastern restaurant. I wanted to incorporate some of it so we have a Moroccan section in the middle of a Spanish song. That's Tom Scott in there playing the lyricon."

"I think instrumental music has to paint pictures," Alpert said. "Like on 'The Lonely Bull,' it took you to that bullring whether you lived in San Diego or Fargo, North Dakota." The pictures Alpert has painted for *Rise*, the album, are as richly detailed and sweeping as any he has ever done. On "Angelina" he juxtaposes a reggae rhythm with touches of Country-Western steel guitar. This same deft creativity runs through all the other tracks: the Joe Sample/Will Jennings tune "Streetlife," Bill Withers' lovely "Love Is," and "Behind the Rain," a song he wrote for Gato Barbieri for his *Caliente* album that Alpert produced. With the help of musicians like Harvey Mason, Louis Johnson (of The Brothers Johnson), Manolo Badrena, Joe Sample, Michel Colombier, and Abe Laboriel, Alpert has made an enchanting and seductive album of music as contemporary and timeless as the artist behind it.