



Five Talented Artists Get Herb Alpert Awards



**Lani Hall Alpert
and Herb Alpert at the ceremony**

For several years I have looked forward to the end of May, when I am invited to attend the ceremony where five very, very talented young people receive their *Herb Alpert Award in the Arts*. This year, the

ceremony was done virtually, rather than at the offices of the **Herb Alpert Foundation** in Santa Monica. But I was still deeply moved by the sight of five selectees receiving their honor...and the \$75,000 unrestricted check that goes with it. Yes, you heard me correctly. Each of the five winners get a check for that enormous sum...which they can use any way they choose...paying bills and rent, or to advance their craft in some way.

Let me explain more fully. This is the 26th year that *the Herb Alpert Foundation* has given five people such a prize. Selected by panels of people who are skilled in the province being honored, these winners are seeing their lives changed much for the better. They are in the categories of Dance, Film/Video, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts..and Rona Sebastian, President of the Foundation, explains to all that the awards are administered by the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts, since 1994) to five exceptional mid-career artists . I have interviewed Herb and his wife, Lani Hall Alpert, many times over the years..and each time I learned something new and interesting about them and the awards. I have never forgotten a comment which Herb made to me when I first asked him why he had initiated the awards so many years ago, and he looked at me and smiled: *I've always loved the artists that travel the road less traveled...these are the artists that touch me.*" Here I must note to my

readers that Herb himself fits that category, an artist who is so, so talented in so many ways...music, of course, but also painting and sculpture. I have written here about the fabulous totem poles he sculpted and installed in Malibu and Santa Monica, and I have shown you some of his exquisite paintings...one actually done with/in coffee. I have also reviewed the wonderful book of short stories which his Grammy Award-winning singer wife, Lani, has written about her growing up in Chicago...*Emotional Memoirs*, a copy of which I always give to all of the women in my life. Just this morning I was playing Herb's new trumpet album in my car, music which invigorates me and just makes me feel better.

The five winners are: Karen Sherman, dance; Sky Hopinka, film/video; Christian Scott aTunde Ajuah (just love that name), music; Phil Soltanoff, theatre, and Firelei Baez, visual arts. Rona reiterated to me that each award is adjudicated by a three member panel of noted artists, and many members of the panels are past winners as well as arts professionals. She again explained to me that they are rewarding creative experimenters who are challenging and transforming art, their respective disciplines, and society. I just love the idea that these talents are possibly going to make a vital contribution to the world...something which we sadly need in this time of crisis.

Irene Borger, the Founding Director of the awards, told me that the five separate panels selecting them said: *Why support this artist at this moment in their artistic trajectory – and right now in the culture?* Their decisions were: *they matter!* How simple and exciting, isn't it? By the way, I must here note that the Herb Alpert Foundation has always done so much to promote *jazz*, the music of my youth and particular passion. (It was this month in 1954 that Boston pianist George Wein and I founded *the Newport Jazz Festival* in the back yard of Elaine Lorillard's farm in Newport. And that was where I met Billie Holiday and she told me to get her book, *Lady Sings the Blues*, which led to my movie.)

I'll end this diatribe by saluting Herb and Lani and their foundation, which has two core purposes *the Arts, and Compassion and Well Being*. My God, what more could anybody ask?