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MARKETABLE COMBINATION: Botti's messianic and good looks have enhanced a strong promotion effort for his album "When I Fall in Love."

Of brass ambition

Can trumpeter Chris Botti's lush new album horn in on turf dominated by jazz singers?

By **Dow HUCKMAN**
Special to The Times

CHRIS BOTTI leans back in his chair on the patio of a West Hollywood hotel, a breeze tousling his blond streaked hair. Garbed in casual sweatshirt and slacks, he could easily pass for a young leading man from the golden film era of the '40s and '50s. Or, perhaps, one of the new, well-groomed vocalists beginning to revive the classics from the Great American Songbook.

What a look at Botti — recently named one of People magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People" — does not bring

to mind is the stereotypical image of a jazz trumpeter.

But that's exactly what he is. And, although his past visibility has largely been traced to his smooth jazz recordings or his work with pop artist Sting, Botti now is on the verge of a potential career breakthrough of his own via the release of a new Columbia CD, "When I Fall in Love." It's a lush collection of standard and contemporary tunes performed with rich orchestral backing.

The album's stylish packaging, filled with fashion magazine-like black-and-white [See Botti, Page E5]

Lush orchestrations for new album

[*Botti, from Page E1*]
photos depicting a moody-looking Botti in the company of a beautiful young woman, immediately suggests that this is no ordinary jazz album. If anything, it recalls some of the covers of the Miles Davis LPs of the '50s and '60s that similarly emphasized a visual characterization to match the music inside the album.

So it's no surprise when Botti mentions Davis — along with Chet Baker and Woody Shaw — as a prime influence. And, although his trumpet sound is more texturally lush than that of Davis, the similarities continue on the CD's tracks. "Let's Fall in Love," arranged by Billy Childs, vividly recalls the Davis-Gil Evans collaborations. Other selections — especially standards such as "When I Fall in Love" and "The Nearness of You" — blend Botti's limpid sound with storytelling phrasing reminiscent of yet another acknowledged influence, Frank Sinatra.

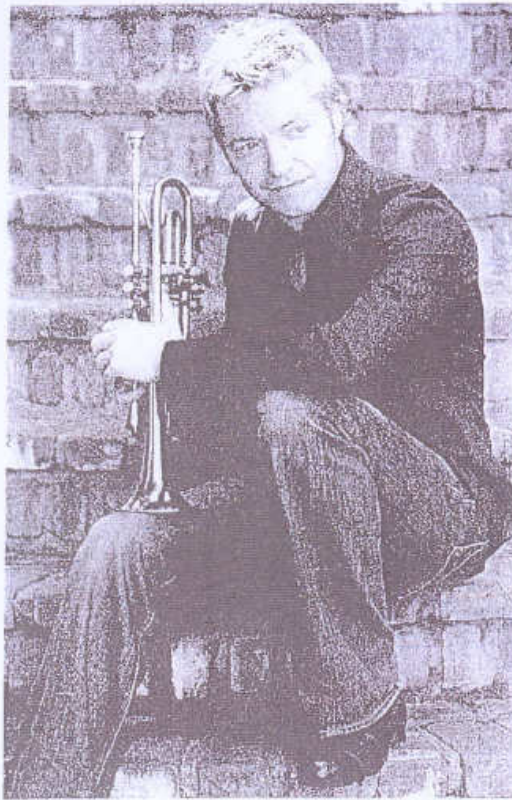
In town for a few quick-hit gigs and in-store appearances, Botti, 41, shakes his head in wonder when the CD is mentioned.

"I can hardly express how much this album means to me," he says. "I wanted to at least make one record like this in my career — one record for which people can say, 'This guy can play the trumpet.' No excuses, no getting wound up with names and genres and styles. Just the trumpet."

Which is all well and good except for the fact that "just the trumpet" albums haven't been doing well lately, with jazz instrumentalists largely taking a back seat since Diana Krall began to lead a wave of vocalists into the foreground nearly a decade ago. And it's been a lot longer than that since trumpeters Herb Alpert, Hugh Masekela and Chuck Mangione successfully reached into the pop world with their own trumpet visions.

All of which raises an intriguing question about the album and its marketing: Can Botti — during a period in which albums by jazz singers seem to outnumber releases from instrumentalists — take the lead in re-orienting the trumpet (as well as the saxophone, the trombone etc.) to jazz prominence? From the record company's point of view, the answer seems to be yes.

"At one time," says Don Ianni, president and chief executive of Sony Music Label Group U.S., "all the great jazz soloists did lush ballads-with-strings albums: Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown, Chet Baker. It's kind of a lost genre, but I thought the time was right for someone young to take a shot at it. A lot of artists



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PURE AND SIMPLE: Chris Botti says he wanted to make "one record for which people can say, 'This guy can play the trumpet.'"

have had recent success with vocal standards albums, and it seemed a natural idea to have Chris do it from the instrumental point of view."

Natural, perhaps, but a bit risky. "Ballads-with-strings albums" can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce, and that calls for a financial level of return not often reached by jazz artists beyond, say, Krall. But Sony has gotten behind the album with a blitzkrieg of promotion, enhanced by Botti's marketable combination of musicality and good looks.

Botti has already appeared on CBS' "The Early Show" and at several Borders stores on both coasts, with upcoming dates on major talk and entertainment shows and ads in major newspapers. He also will perform "Someone to Watch Over Me" with full orchestra at the Nobel Prize ceremonies, to be televised worldwide from Oslo, Norway, on Dec. 10.

The initial response to all this actively appears to indicate that Ianni's risk was worth taking. The CD entered Billboard's traditional jazz chart at No. 1 and the pop album chart at No. 124 on Oct. 5.

Botti, however, is reluctant to take on the mantle of a crossover pathfinder. For him, the album represents a much more personal transition — one that finally allows him to express the affection for melody, space and balance that has been the heart-beat of his music since he first picked up the trumpet.

He recalls the specific moment at which the notion of recording an album in which melody and emotion were preeminent. It was, he says, "a virtual epiphany" that took place on stage at Carnegie Hall in April. Partnering with Sting, he was scheduled to perform a specially arranged version of "Moon River" for the annual Rainforest Foundation Benefit Concert.

"Sting said, 'We'll just go to the front of the stage and do it, no microphones,'" recalls Botti. "So we walked to the front of the stage. Behind me, Gil Goldstein was conducting this 50-piece orchestra playing a sublime arrangement of 'Moon River.' Sting's singing, and I'm playing my trumpet. And as I looked out at the audience, with that incredible flow of sound from Gil's arrangement washing over me and Sting and I are standing there playing and singing, looking at the audience, and I'm thinking, 'Man, what have I been doing my whole career?'"

What Botti's been doing has been establishing a solid reputation for himself, first as a dependable band mate for pop artists such as Sting, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon and Natalie Merchant, and second as a solo recording artist with six albums released in the last decade.

Botti was born in Portland, Ore., and grew up in Corvallis, encouraged in his musical goals by his mother, a classical pianist. He attended Indiana University before heading to New York in 1986, joining Paul Simon's backup band in 1990 and staying with him for five years before making his first album.

"The thing I got from playing with Sting and Joni Mitchell, and Miles too, of course," says Botti, "was the idea of playing with space, with being lyrical, with finding balance."

After experiencing his Carnegie Hall moment of insight, he decided that the primary goal for his next album would be to emphasize those qualities while featuring the sound of the trumpet, along with "great melodies arranged by great arrangers."

"Most of all, I wanted to make as much of the record as we could in single takes, the way all classic jazz records are made, the way Sinatra made them."

Whether "When I Fall in Love" will revive a wider interest in the rich emotional moods that sensitive instrumentalists can create remains to be seen. But it seems apparent that Botti's soaring trumpet lines, wordlessly expressing the musical poetry in classic songs, have opened a window into an area of instrumental jazz that has been closed for too long.

"I think there's an appetite out there for people who make music rather than those who are propped up by computers," he says. "Everyone mentions the success of Noran Jones and Diana Krall as examples of this, and there's no question that they make great music. But there's also no reason why instrumentalists can't do it too."