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Brian Wilson

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CHRISTIAN MATIJAS-MECCA

The Words and Music of Brian Wilson

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THE PRAEGER SINGER-SONGWRITER COLLECTION

The Words and Music of Brian Wilson

Christian Matijas-Mecca

James E. Perone, Series Editor



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Series Foreword

Although the term “singer-songwriter” might most frequently be associated with a cadre of musicians of the early 1970s such as Paul Simon, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Joni Mitchell, Cat Stevens, and Carole King, the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection defines singer-songwriters more broadly, both in terms of style and time period. The series includes volumes on musicians who have been active from approximately the early 1960s through the present. Musicians who write and record in folk, rock, soul, hip-hop, country, and various hybrids of these styles are represented.

What do the individuals included in this series have in common? Some have never collaborated as writers, whereas others have, but all have written and recorded commercially successful and/or historically important music and lyrics at some point in their careers.

The authors who contribute to the series also exhibit diversity. Some are scholars who are trained primarily as musicians, whereas others have such areas of specializations as American studies, history, sociology, popular culture studies, literature, and rhetoric. The authors share a high level of scholarship, accessibility in their writing, and a true insight into the work of the artists they study. The authors are also focused on the output of their subjects and how it relates to their subjects’ biographies and the society around them; however, biography in and of itself is not a major focus of the books in this series.

Given the diversity of the musicians who are the subject of the books in this series, and given the diversity of viewpoint of the authors, volumes in the series differ from book to book. All, however, are organized chronologically

around the compositions and recordings of their subjects. All of the books in the series also serve as listeners' guides to the music of their subjects, making them companions to the artists' recorded output.

James E. Perone
Series Editor

Acknowledgments

This study of Brian Wilson's music will focus on work that, as of 2016, has been commercially released and where Brian has served as the composer, primary performer, producer, collaborator, or secondary (backing) performer. He has produced a significant body of work that has never been released and for which much is unfinished, so I will limit this study to those works that have been available on vinyl, tape, compact disc, or as digital downloads. I have made two exceptions and included *Adult/Child* (1978) and *Sweet Insanity* (1991). Both have circulated as complete, albeit bootleg, albums that inform the larger study of his work.

I am indebted to a number of authors whose prior and exhaustive work has allowed me to present a thorough, narrative arc of Wilson's creative work. The Beach Boys have been written about perhaps more than any other American group, and conflicting accounts across multiple sources in regard to what happened when, where, and with whom, present challenges for any researcher. Many people in this story have passed on, and the memories of those who remain are fluid and subject to extensive revisionism, as is expected over the course of a half-century. Memoirs by both Brian Wilson and Mike Love have been published as this volume enters production, and have supplied two additional layers to their complex story. Many who were present in the early years: Hite and Dorinda Morgan, Herb Newman, Joe Saraceno, Gary Usher, Roger Christian, Nik Venet, Chuck Britz, members of the Wrecking Crew, and of course, Murry, Audree, Dennis, and Carl Wilson, have all passed on.

A significant thanks goes to Brad Elliott, David Leaf, Mark Lewisohn, Stephen Kalinich, and James B. Murphy, for their generous time addressing

my questions. I would also like to thank (in alphabetical order) Kingsley Abbott, Keith Badman, Peter Ames Carlin, Mark Dillon, Andrew G. Doe, Steven Gaines, Andrew Hickey, Philip Lambert, Mark Linett, David Marks, Stephen McParland, Dominic Priore, Peter Reum, Ian Rusten, Jeff Sellars, Jules Siegel, Jon Stebbins, John Tobler, Timothy White, and Paul Williams. This book would have been infinitely more difficult without their dedicated and enthusiastic research. In addition, I would like to thank Jean Sievers, Carl Caprioglio at Oglia Entertainment, and University of Michigan's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, who sponsored my assistants, Laura Dzubay and Bailey Minney. They compiled the database and comprehensive works list for use as an online resource, and I owe Laura and Bailey sincere thanks for their contributions. The accompanying works list for this book, www.wilsonsingersongwriter.com, will catalog Brian Wilson's creative work as composer, producer, performer, and collaborator over the course of his 50-plus year career. Thank you to ArtSite Design, Daniel Worley and the late O'Bryan Worley, for their Web site design. At the University of Michigan, I would like to thank Dr. Angela Kane for her support in this endeavor and Dr. Marie McCarthy, Director of Research.

Like Brian, I attended El Camino College in Torrance, CA, where I discovered the inspiration to think and believe beyond what I had been told was possible. While there I had four professors whose guidance, encouragement, and influence continues to inform my own teaching at the University of Michigan. For the past 25 years, I have recalled their gestures at the start of every academic year. For Joseph Bloch, who kicked me out of his English class for my intransigent refusal to think, but introduced me to Joyce's "The Dubliners." Melinda Barth, who took me into her English class and introduced me to Kafka's "The Hunger Artist." Two music professors, the late Dr. Robert Haag, who, before a music history class, matter-of-factly handed me two brand-new volumes of Mozart Piano Concerti and said, "I already have copies of these, and thought you might make use of them." As one of the least advanced, but blindly enthusiastic pianists in the school, he encouraged me to be a completist, but more importantly, he taught me to always look (and think) beyond a given moment. To James Mack, who let me join the percussion section of his orchestra when I had no prior orchestral or percussion experience, but kicked me out for an unprofessional lack of dedication, then took me back after I wised up and apologized to him. He taught me that second chances are never to be wasted. At Interlochen Arts Academy I have to thank the late Edward Banghart, with whom I developed my skills of argumentation on composers from Spontini to Berlioz and Honegger. Before meeting him, music was only something I performed.

Special Thanks go to my editor, James Perone, for the opportunity to prepare this volume. Additional thanks to Catherine Lafuente and Elana Palace at ABC-CLIO. I am fortunate to consider five esteemed scholars as friends who have mentored and encouraged me, posed pointed questions, and have

engaged in conversations from A to Z: Andrew Mead, Abigail Stewart, Roland John Wiley, David Winter, and Albin Zak. My feline companions, Cassiel, Eliot, Isabel, and Josie, who temper the isolation of writing, and without question, my partner, Karen Fournier, without whom I could never have transformed this wish into reality.

Lastly, I would like to thank Brian Wilson who has given so much of himself through his music . . . Columnated ruins domino . . .

Prelude

OCTOBER 22, 1966

Brian Wilson stood on the stage of Hill Auditorium at 825 N. University Ave in Ann Arbor, MI, to rehearse the Beach Boys for the world premiere live performance of “Good Vibrations.”¹ “Good Vibrations” would be the Beach Boys’s biggest hit and their last chart-topping single until 1988’s “Kokomo,” the first and only Beach Boys number one record to not involve Brian Wilson. But in the fall of 1966, “Good Vibrations,” one of the most progressive and richly produced singles in pop music, enabled Brian to demonstrate that popular music could no longer be dismissed as irrelevant or disposable.² This was not the only time Brian Wilson would make music history in Ann Arbor. Thirty-two years, five months later, and two blocks west of Hill Auditorium, Brian would make pop music history on one more occasion.

MARCH 9, 1999

Brian Wilson is scheduled to perform a solo concert at the Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor, MI, nine months after the release of his second solo album, *Imagination*, a pleasant collection of middle-of-the-road pop. Brian Wilson, the stage-phobic aural auteur who, by 1968, had relinquished artistic control of the Beach Boys and slowly withdrawn into semi-seclusion while he battled psychological and substance abuse issues for over two decades, was back once again. Over the course of his post-1968 career, Brian had become a phantom presence in the world of popular music, and each time it was announced he was back, fans were treated to the image of

a man whose vocal prowess and physical well-being had seemingly vanished. As described by Peter Ames Carlin, “(his) public suffering had transformed him from a musical figure into a cultural one.”³ Over the course of his life, myths, rumors, and legends would emerge, and stories of drug abuse, obesity, and mental illness would color his legacy. It would not matter because this concert would be a game changer not only for Brian but also for the 1700 fans that filled the theater. Minutes after the scheduled 7:30 pm show time, a collage of images and video clips from the earliest days of the Beach Boys to the present day signaled the start of the show. A wave of emotions washed over the house when images of Brian, Dennis (who died in 1983), and Carl (who succumbed to cancer in 1998) appeared on the screen. Images of Wilson as a young man performing with the Beach Boys were interspersed with images from the 1976 NBC special that presented the obese and emotionally shattered artist, a sad buffoon in the not-so-funny side show that formally fetishized his “condition,” and gave us an indelible image of Brian that would be remembered for the next 12-plus years.⁴ Fifteen minutes later, a figure was led downstage and the lights came up to show Brian, front and center, seated behind a keyboard, and over the next two hours he sang and led his band through a lengthy collection of masterfully executed hits.

JULY 5, 2015

In the splendor of the Art Deco, Fox Theatre in midtown Detroit, Brian Wilson, with his band and special guests, Al Jardine and Blondie Chaplin, performed songs from his extensive catalog and selections from his newest album, *No Pier Pressure*. Sixteen years after Brian’s improbable return as a concert artist, the Fox Theatre was filled with more than 4000 fans that were there to hear the then 73-year-old artist. His career over the past 12-plus years was filled with live performances that included complete performances of *Pet Sounds*, but it was his 2004 release, *Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE (BWPS)*, that placed everything else into perspective. *SMiLE*, the mythical, widely bootlegged, and unreleased Beach Boys masterpiece, represented Brian Wilson’s musical and emotional undoing in 1967. Brian’s 2004 recording presented the songs in what might have been his intended track order before he walked away from the project in mid-1967. To complete the work 35 years later, a few musical links were composed with his original collaborator, Van Dyke Parks.

Other solo albums, *Gettin’ in Over My Head* (2004) and *Lucky Old Sun* (2008), showed Brian as an active and creative musical force. He released a collection of works by George Gershwin and a disc of songs from Disney movies. In 2011 Capitol Records released *The SMiLE Sessions*, Brian’s “teenage symphony to God” as performed and recorded by the Beach Boys in 1966–1967 proved Brian was at the cutting edge of popular music in the year of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Jimi Hendrix, and the Monterey Pop

Festival. The 50th anniversary of the Beach Boys in 2011–2012 brought Brian, Mike, Al, Bruce, and David Marks together for a golden anniversary tour and a new album composed entirely of original material, *That's Why God Made the Radio* and their first group effort since 1985's eponymous, Steve Levine-produced album. The album reached number 3 on the Billboard charts and was their highest charting album of new material since 1965's *Summer Days (and Summer Nights!!)*. In 2015, Brian's life was dramatized into the critically acclaimed movie *Love and Mercy*, which brought his story to the attention of younger audiences, and he released a new solo album, *No Pier Pressure*.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION TO MT. VERNON AND FAIRWAY

Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys were unlikely candidates for pop music stardom. Though raised in a musical family, Brian displayed no significant aptitude for any particular instrument and had limited skills in reading music notation.⁵ He developed a beautiful tenor voice through singing at home with his parents, Murry and Audree, and brothers, Dennis and Carl. Murry taught his sons the pleasures that could be found in making music and the importance of singing from the heart. With these simple tools, Brian created a body of work that has been central to the popular music canon for over five decades.

Who is Brian Wilson? To many, he is the artist who cofounded the iconic American band, the Beach Boys, and for whom he created a body of work that has few rivals in the canon of American popular music. Dennis Wilson, speaking about his older brother in 1976, said, "He is the most vulnerable human being I know . . . I am dumbfounded . . . in awe of him." But "what" made Brian Wilson, and how was he able to create musical tapestries that reflected both place and time and captured the ethos of the California experience in ways that few artists have achieved? Like so many families in mid-century Southern California, Brian descended from Midwesterners who had migrated to California in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Wilsons were from Hutchinson, KS, having moved there from Meigs County, OH, in the late nineteenth century. The ingenuity and dreams that fired Brian's creative spirit had passed through multiple generations of Wilsons, Stohles, and Korthofs, before they settled into Brian's magical and mystical imagination. Brian created a body of work with a DNA that was shaped over four generations across the United States. Through his songs we can witness, observe, and experience an expansive range of emotions and events that encompass feelings of joy, humor, melancholy, beauty, and irrepressible fun. Brian was not only a singer, songwriter, and producer for the Beach Boys, but he also produced and composed songs for numerous other artists, and in the later decades of his career has lent his creative imprint to a variety of projects that include children's songs, songs for animated shows, and tribute albums to artists

whom Brian has admired, such as Buddy Holly, Harry Nilsson, Doc Pomus, and Woody Guthrie.

Through his music, Brian Wilson became the primary architect of a mythical and magical Southern California. Tapped directly from his imagination since he could never live in that world, Brian created a reality all of us wanted to believe because we too wanted to escape into that same world. While living almost exclusively in his own mind, the world Brian created disappeared many years ago. The recordings he made with the Beach Boys allow us to hold onto a belief in the perpetual existence of a magical Southern California, and we show no indication of letting that escape our grasp. People will always remember Brian Wilson when they hear “Fun, Fun, Fun,” “The Warmth of the Sun,” “Surfer Girl,” and countless other of his songs. Without him, Los Angeles and the Pacific Coast would still have lured tens of millions of people, but our mystical belief in that magical place would be very different. Why did we place so much importance upon this artist? Why did we not allow him to continue his search for the personal contentment that had eluded him for so long, and why did we insist that he tell us that same wonderful story again and again. The “Magic Transistor Radio” he sang of in “Mount Vernon and Fairway” was confirmation that we continued to live in a dream that no longer existed, but instead we asked why was it that Brian insisted on creating strange music. Why did he do this to all of us, and why did he not write songs that allowed us to sustain a dream that never really existed?

Brian Douglas Wilson was born on June 20, 1942, in Inglewood’s Centinela Hospital to Murry Gage Wilson and Audree Korthof Wilson, both of whom were born in the later years of the First World War and whose families had migrated from the Midwest to California between the end of the war and the onset of the Great Depression.⁶ Murry and Audree met at George Washington High School in south Los Angeles, and were drawn together through their shared love of music. They married in March 1938, three years after graduation, saved for a home, and four years later, Brian, the first of three boys, was born. He was joined by brothers Dennis Carl (December 4, 1944–December 28, 1983) and Carl Dean (December 21, 1946–February 6, 1988), three brothers in America’s first wave of the “Baby Boom” generation.

The Wilsons were a musical family. Audree sang and loved to play boogie-woogie piano. Murry was an aspiring songwriter who composed in his spare time while he supported his family and rose to own his own machining company. He had a handful of songs recorded by professional musicians, but his greatest achievement “Two Step Side Step” was performed in 1953 by the Lawrence Welk Orchestra and broadcast nationally on Welk’s “On the Air from the Aragon.”⁷ It was recorded by Johnnie Lee Wills on RCA Victor and published by Guild Music. Guild was owned by Hite and Dorinda Morgan, and the Morgans, with their son Bruce, would figure into the Beach Boys story less than a decade later. Brian attended Hawthorne High School, received a used 1957 Ford Fairlane from Murry and Audree for his 17th

birthday, and was a talented, if not outstanding, athlete who graduated in 1960 with fellow athlete and music enthusiast, Al Jardine. He was well-liked by his peers and is remembered for his sense of humor. He did not have a steady girlfriend, and though plenty of girls liked Brian, none were ever drawn to him as a boyfriend. His first girlfriend was Judy Bowles, a pretty, blonde-haired girl, four years his junior, and the inspiration for “Surfer Girl.”⁸

Brian’s cousin, Mike Love (b. March 15, 1941), loved to sing doo-wop and rhythm and blues. He was the eldest son of Murry Wilson’s sister, Emily (Glee) and Milton Love. They lived at Mt. Vernon and Fairway in the upscale and affluent (when compared to Hawthorne) Baldwin Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles. Like their Hawthorne cousins, Milton and Glee’s family loved music, and sing-alongs were as common in the Love household as they were in the Wilson home. As the eldest children in their respective families, Brian and Mike would sing together to escape the flurry of joint family activities and learned to blend Brian’s clear, high tenor, with Mike’s flexible and resonant bass-baritone. Mike was a year older than Brian and had his own challenges. He attended Los Angeles City College for one year, but dropped out upon learning his girlfriend was pregnant. Before long he was married with a baby on the way while he worked two jobs, one for his father’s sheet metal stamping company and an evening job pumping gas at a Standard Oil station.⁹ Most narratives about Brian focus on the magical vocal blend created by the three Wilson brothers, but Brian’s voice is as inextricably linked to his cousin Mike as it was to Dennis and Carl, because Mike’s distinctive baritone was the foundation in so many of Brian’s arrangements. Mike did not have the creative DNA with which Brian was gifted, but his voice was as central to Brian’s initial efforts as were those of Carl and Dennis.

In *The Nearest Faraway Place*, Timothy White shares a story of Brian and Mike’s grandfather Buddy, “the unfulfilled hothead,” and his brother Johnny (great-uncle to the Wilson and Love families), the “vulnerable but productive dreamer,” in a story that has numerous parallels to Brian and Mike’s relationship and their respective personalities.¹⁰ Johnny Wilson was an imaginative inventor and builder who suffered from shell shock after he served in the First World War and was never able to fulfill the exceptional promise he had shown before the war. Johnny and Buddy’s brother, Charlie Wilson, described Johnny’s challenge as, “Maybe if he’d gone slow . . . But no one let him go slow, and he’s too sensitive. He was the hero of the family, full of ideas and dreams bigger than all the rest of us . . .”¹¹ Uncle Charlie’s words about his adored brother can also frame many of Brian’s personal challenges. Brian is averse to conflict, but his complex relationship with Mike has endured simply because they are family. Mike was there in 1961 to encourage Brian to do something with music as he desperately needed an escape from his prematurely settled life as a working family man. Brian attended El Camino College but dropped out one semester short of an Associate of Arts degree. In the year that followed Brian’s graduation from high school, he managed to “do”

something with music that involved Mike and his brothers Dennis and Carl. He wrote, recorded, and released his first single, “Surfin’.”

A SEA OF TUNES . . . SURF’S UP!

In the introduction to the 1993 boxed set *Good Vibrations: Thirty Years of the Beach Boys*, David Leaf opens with “*An American Family making music just because they loved the way it made ‘em feel . . .*”. Brian’s songs continue to move people of all ages, and it is for this reason that he is as relevant an artist now as he was a half-century ago. Fans go to his concerts because they love his music, and many know of the challenges he has survived over the course of his career, and are there to enjoy an artist who continues to flourish and surprise his fans with every new record. Brian is a survivor who has continued to create wonderful music and can share with his fans the extraordinary masterpieces upon which his legacy was created. David Anderle, the first president of Brother Records, stated in late-1967, “The next big Brian Wilson thing will not happen with the Beach Boys.”¹² That “next big thing” ultimately had to wait for two decades, and though Brian’s solo career would run with fits and starts until the late 1990s, he has, in the new century, pursued a path that allows him to do what he wants to do, not what a band, the family, or his record company, want him to do.

David Leaf wrote about Brian in performance with the Beach Boys in the late 1970s, “For Brian . . . any concert is an ordeal . . . Stoically, he sat at his grand piano, sometimes playing, sometimes singing . . . and while his voice revealed no emotion, his onstage behavior was a spectacle of nervousness.”¹³ The Beach Boys were a job to which he felt obligated because the group was a family concern, and when Brian first retired from touring, his father Murry called him a “traitor” for having left the band.¹⁴ From the band’s first record in 1961, the Beach Boys have been both a family and a business entity. At first they were led and directed by Murry Wilson, father to Brian, Dennis, and Carl and uncle to Mike Love. As the band quickly developed into an industry with albums, tours, a record label, and later, a recording studio, Brian’s creative agenda would often be at odds with the various business and family agendas that reside at the center of Brian’s many challenges.

In any study of Brian Wilson’s music, it is important to consider his relationship with Murry. Murry demanded that Capitol provide Brian with the autonomy he desired in order to produce records without executive oversight in studios of Brian’s choosing, and he managed the band until mid-1964 when tensions escalated to a point where Brian would fire him. Murry often wanted to impose his own creative ideas on the band and though he believed in Brian and pushed him to try harder, he also bullied, criticized, and abused Brian for what he perceived to be laziness or weakness. He was a man of his time who came of age through the depression and worked hard for his family to make a life that was far more comfortable than what he experienced as a

young man. Some biographers have been generous in their analysis of Murry, while others describe him as a sadistic bully. The loss of his left eye in an industrial workplace accident drove Murry to always work harder than the next guy, which shaped and hardened his views towards raising his boys and later on, managing their band. The stories of Murry's parenting methods can sound like "a demented mixture of Charles Dickens and David Lynch."¹⁵ Tony Asher remembered him as "a really sick man . . . pathetically so." Still, there was a genuine respect between Brian and Murry, however dysfunctional it may have been. In 1969, Murry sold the Sea of Tunes publishing company he founded for Brian for \$700,000 because he felt the band was past its prime by the end of the decade and their music would never be as popular or able to generate income equal to what they earned in the 1960s. Murry constantly stressed the importance of family (though he would cheat both family and nonfamily members, especially Mike) and the guilt associated with his father's actions dogged Brian through much of his life and surely influenced career and life choices that were not in his best interests.¹⁶ For every horrific story about Murry and Brian's relationship, there is a story that gives credit to Murry for his persistence and dedication to the group. Instead, I will look at Brian's extraordinary body of music, his extensive collaborative relationships, and the musical narratives that have endured across multiple generations of listeners and defied the continually evolving landscape of popular music.

"Genius musician but an amateur human being," "washed-up," "bloated," "another sad fucking case," and "a loser." Those were some of the kinder opinions of industry insiders who dealt with Brian in the first half of the 1970s. By the middle of that decade, Brian was pushed back into a world he had created 14 years earlier and "encouraged" to compose, produce, and lead the Beach Boys. He delivered work that was considered by many to be uneven in quality, and though he was capable of producing work with enthusiasm and passion, it was with different varieties of passion and precision than he exhibited in earlier records. We always want to look at the Brian Wilson of 1963–1966 and are reluctant to acknowledge that he has grown, changed, and discovered new interests and ideas and are inclined to view him as a commodity rather than as an artist. Marilyn Wilson, Brian's first wife, has said "He doesn't just think of music; his body was just music . . . you know, creating music for Brian, sitting down at the piano and writing music is just as easy for Brian as walking. That was the easy part. Life was hard for Brian."¹⁷ Between the unfortunate mid-1970s marketing agenda of "Brian's Back" and the 2004 release of *Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE*, Brian's work was never evaluated on its own merits because it would be compared unfavorably to his work before *SMiLE*. For over 30 years, the culture of "what-if-Brian-had-continued-on-in-1967" used to weigh the value of every musical work he composed. Marilyn, in speaking about one of Brian's most beautiful songs, "Caroline, No," has said that Brian ". . . constantly remembers his past and still relates to it and everybody in it."¹⁸ While true, the irony is that Brian

had moved forward, but we chose to look over our shoulder to a past where Brian used to reside. David Anderle, in a 1997 conversation with *Crawdaddy* founder Paul Williams said “. . . There’s no way Brian can go back and pick up the pieces . . . the magic of Brian was his innocence . . . to me personally, *Smile’s* finished . . . it was never meant to have, a shape . . . it’s just a, a, a large moment of music, of literal musics.”¹⁹ In his view, “It was finished when Brian stopped working on it. And that is the way it was supposed to have been.”²⁰ Anderle’s argument makes sense when we consider the life Brian endured in the years that followed *SMiLE*, but he surprised everyone with the 2004 release of *Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE*, an album that allowed him to reclaim his own legacy and creative agenda.

The many collaborators with whom Brian chose to work throughout his career helped him to create an extraordinarily rich body of work and include such artists as Gary Usher, Bob Norberg, Mike Love, Roger Christian, Jan Berry, Tony Asher, Stephen Kalinich, Russ Titelman, Van Dyke Parks, Andy Paley, and Darian Sahanaja. As early as 1962, Brian collaborated as coauthor, producer, or performer with a number of artists outside of the Beach Boys, but the dysfunctional dynamics within the Wilson family challenged and ultimately ended many of those relationships. Murry Wilson brought Brian’s collaborative partnerships with both Usher and Christian to a premature end, and Mike Love’s strong opinions were responsible in limiting Brian’s work with Tony Asher, Van Dyke Parks, Danny Hutton, and other artists. Brian created his best work when he was in a healthy and supportive partnership, but his most dynamic collaborations were often thwarted as a result of family pressures. In that same 1997 interview with David Anderle, he states “. . . ’Cause Brian needs somebody there all the time . . . Because Brian functions really well in the company of friendship. It’s a good thing for him. So if he can find . . . these people, who will encourage him to continue just to make music, and not worry about what the music means.”²¹ Former publicist Derek Taylor talked about Brian being good company when he was all right, but his need for people would turn against him as he encountered resistance to his work. Taylor quit working for Brian in May 1967 because he found him too demanding and too difficult to handle. Anderle worried that the pressures upon Brian continue(d) (in 1997) to add to the baggage of *SMiLE*, but with the 2004 release of *Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE*, Brian was able to free himself of that legacy and pursue new projects. The past 15 years have been among his most prolific in terms of recordings, new projects, and live performances.

“Don’t fuck with the formula,” a quote frequently attributed to Mike Love was a reminder that Brian should not forget what brought success, fame, and riches to the band: namely, a winning formula that encompassed themes of fun, sun, surf, cars, and girls.²² Anderle believes this quote has been taken out of context, as Mike was focused on the bottom line and less concerned with the “artistic” side of the business equation.²³ This quote has also served

as the thesis for the perpetual Wilson-Love conflict, so while *Pet Sounds* and *SMiLE* may have been artistic ventures, they did not fit with Mike's world view of the Beach Boys. When Brian announced to the Beach Boys that he would no longer tour, he presented the scenario as, "There's no need to worry . . . I foresee a beautiful future for the Beach Boys. But the only way we can achieve it is if we all do our separate jobs. You guys will tour. I will stay in the studio and make music."²⁴ Mike and the rest of the band assumed that if Brian said he would stay home and make music, that he would make "their" music. This was the first of many volleys in the battle for Brian's creative spirit that would set him against his family, his band, and the record labels who would have him under contract for the next 20 years. Those parties usually won, but always at great cost to Brian.

The Beach Boys's first five studio albums, from *Surfin' Safari* through *All Summer Long*, were filled with upbeat themes and remain among the band's most popular records. The more complex and elaborate work heard on *Beach Boys Today!* and *Summer Days (and Summer Nights!!)* were within acceptable creative boundaries but still produced good sales and chart activity, but with *Pet Sounds* and then with *SMiLE*, the band's opinions and the expectations of Capitol Records were pushed to their limits. Brian's confidence unraveled and he relinquished creative leadership and control over the Beach Boys and passively acquiesced to a democratically led concern. As a result, the Beach Boys would struggle for the rest of their careers to find their way out of a storm of their own creation. When, in June 1974, Capitol Records released the triple platinum "oldies" compilation, *Endless Summer*, the band's niche as a nostalgia act was set. Though the Beach Boys would continue to produce new records in the decade that followed *Endless Summer*, those records never attained the level of popularity, respect, or audience (to the frustration of Warner Brothers Records and later, Columbia Records) of their earlier work because the thousands who came to hear them perform, came to hear Brian's "classic" hits. Many Beach Boys albums from 1969 to 1985 contained wonderful music from Brian, but, with the exception of *Love You* (1977), neither the songs nor their attendant albums should be wholly considered as Brian's work, but work that his band and producers sought to make sound like Brian Wilson.

From 1963 to mid-1967, Brian Wilson created an extraordinary body of work that had few rivals in the field of popular music. He controlled every aspect of the work, from composition and arrangement to performance and production. The resistance he faced both from his band and his record company when making *Pet Sounds* and *SMiLE* resulted in his refusal to complete the latter, his "teenage symphony to God," the work he believed would be his greatest achievement. Once his masterpiece was shelved, his compositional output declined, and after 1968's *Friends*, the number of songs he placed on Beach Boys albums would decline in number to a point where the Beach Boys might take whatever "piece" of a Brian Wilson song they could acquire, and

turn it into a complete work. As he removed himself from the band, others believed they could (or should) provide their own input to “help” Brian along. Perhaps he needed different lyrics or some other element because they believed the song lacked the “punch” it needed to become a hit record, or he may have left the song in a partially finished state and it would require someone to take it upon themselves to “complete” Brian’s work. The change in the power structure within the Beach Boys allowed for the development of outrageous narratives about Brian so his band and record company could construct and manage the public image of an artist whose creative vision they had chosen to shut down in 1967.

When the Beatles broke up and each of the four members evolved into solo artists, no one expected that any one of them would make records that sounded like those they had made as the Beatles. Fans chose either to like or dislike the very different work created by each of the four, but no one expected the “sound” of the Beatles to have carried on. When Brian shut down *SMiLE*, he only shut down his latest work, not the group who performed his music. As the band continued on, people expected Brian would want to create hits, just as he had done prior to 1967. When he chose to pursue creative avenues that were distinct from the Beach Boys, fans waited impatiently for Brian to return to what both he and the Beach Boys used to be, and he was never allowed to stand outside our need for him to serve the commercial expectations of the Beach Boys. Bob Dylan and Miles Davis are perhaps the only musical artists in the popular arena to choose, throughout the course of their respective careers, to evolve through the adoption of radical and commercially defiant changes. Unlike those artists, Brian Wilson was synonymous with another entity, the Beach Boys, and they continued to perform his music, even when they barely had an audience. The Beach Boys continued to pursue their role as the vehicle for Brian’s music, even when his music no longer was “Beach Boys Music.”

If we scan the titles of Brian’s songs from 1968 to 1971, they provide some indication of where Brian was and can be interpreted as notice that perhaps it was everyone else who had it all wrong. Brian composed a number of works that are best described as “a-day-in-the-life-of” songs, simple litanies of his activities on a given day. Titles such as “Passing By,” “Busy Doin’ Nothin’,” “I Went to Sleep,” “Games Two Can Play,” and “Time to Get Alone,” are just a few of his songs from the late 1960s that are thematically distinct from what he had composed just a few years earlier. Ironically, two of his late decade hits, “Do It Again” and “Break Away” could be read as his willingness to, in fact, “do it again,” or to literally “break-away” and leave it all for someone else.²⁵ In the early 1970s, glorious songs such as “All I Wanna Do,” “This Whole World,” “Add Some Music to Your Day,” “At My Window,” “H.E.L.P. Is on the Way,” and “Til’ I Die” bring us to the edge of Brian’s inner world that was miles away from the exuberance of “Fun, Fun, Fun.” One of Brian’s most stunning works, “Til’ I Die,” with its swirling canvas of aural colors,

possesses a depth and richness comparable to (and perhaps beyond) “The Warmth of the Sun,” “California Girls,” or “Wouldn’t It Be Nice.”²⁶ The lyrics expose Brian’s most honest and heartfelt emotions and were as intimate and personal as anything Tony Asher composed for *Pet Sounds*. “Til I Die” is 2 minutes and 44 seconds of absolute, crystalline magic, and might be the last song Brian released that was wholly his creation in the way the “classic” records from 1963 to 1967 were, when the Beach Boys were simply the vehicle through which he expressed his purest visions. Six years after “Til I Die” Brian recorded two songs, “Still I Dream of It” and “It’s Over Now,” for the never-released *Adult/Child* album, that express feelings similar to “Til I Die.” But where “Til I Die” may “sound” like the Beach Boys, the *Adult/Child* songs were in a style so removed from anything that could be considered Beach Boys-like, that they were roundly rejected and would not be issued for over 15 years.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Brian would once again find creative, respectful, and enthusiastic collaborators. He was reunited with Gary Usher in 1986 for sessions that would lead to the recording of *Brian Wilson* and would collaborate with Andy Paley, who would work with Brian throughout much of the 1990s. Joe Thomas, Scott Bennett, Jeffrey Foskett, Darian Sahanaja, and by extension, the Wondermints became Brian’s collaborators, and, by all appearances, have been supportive collaborators and creative foils for Brian. These partnerships have enabled Brian to create a significant body of work that includes the reconstruction and recording of *Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE*, the work that represented the end of his “classic” period, and the beginning of an era when fans chose to not listen to what Brian “said” and instead “wished” for him to say something different. Fans and critics have, since the 1988 release of *Brian Wilson*, debated the value, worth, and quality of Brian’s output of the past 25 years when, in truth, Brian’s return to creating music was an artistic triumph and a gift to his fans. After years of denying its existence with claims that it was incomplete, in fragments, or unable to be salvaged, Brian presented *SMiLE* on record and in concert, and put an end to the legend that surrounded this work.

Beach Boys records are perhaps the most reissued documents in the history of popular music. From *The Best of the Beach Boys* in 1966 and for nearly every year beyond, themed compilations, greatest hits collections, and reconfigured albums on a variety of labels have made it a challenge to evaluate Brian’s music in the order or context in which it was originally created and released. When Capitol Records began to reissue the Beach Boys catalog on compact disc in 1990, they paired many of the original albums in “two-fer” configurations with two albums on one CD and included previously unreleased tracks to maximize the usable time afforded by the compact disc. These presented fans with the most comprehensive and chronological collection of Beach Boys albums ever made available at any period in the band’s history. The 1993 release of *Good Vibrations: Thirty Years of the Beach Boys* offered a wealth of

material that included the familiar hits in addition to previously unreleased tracks known only to serious collectors and excerpts from *SMiLE*. The 2013 boxed set, *Made in California*, offered more previously unreleased songs to an already extensive body of work.

The Wilson, Love, and Jardine, families were not dissimilar to other suburban families in the California of post-World War II United States. This was the American middle-class in a newly created land of opportunity that comprised stay-at-home moms, community activities, church, PTA, with fathers who earned a living wage in one of the state's many burgeoning industries. Brian grew up in Hawthorne, CA, a suburb south of downtown Los Angeles that was like so many other nearly identical suburbs in the Los Angeles basin that rose from the nether fields, first in the depression, then during and after the Second World War, as a home for the thousands of new residents who came to California in search of work and a better life.²⁷ When Tom Nolan described Hawthorne as a "post-World War II stucco community," he could be describing any number of the small towns dotted with modern, but modest, homes that expanded southward on numbered streets from downtown Los Angeles to the port cities of San Pedro and Long Beach. These modest, bungalow-style homes were fronted by comfortable lawns with new sidewalks and curbs, fitted with two or three bedrooms, one bath, a modern kitchen, and a garage because every family would have an automobile. While these newly designed suburbs might serve a family's immediate needs, it was assumed the family breadwinner would drive to a job located in Los Angeles or one of its nearby towns.²⁸ These suburbs were the new "Anytown USA" of post-war United States. They were provincial, homogenous, culturally bereft, and suffocating in their conservative and ordinary comforts. This newly created reality is where the Wilson, Love, Jardine, Marks, and countless other post-war families raised their children.²⁹ As victors in two world wars, the United States developed a military, aeronautic, and space agenda that was second to none in what was then called the free world. Many of the industries needed to support this new chapter in America's history were developed in California and warranted the construction of factories, subsidiary industries, and new suburbs in which semiskilled and skilled workers could build a life that was unlike any world their parents would have known. New schools and a nation-leading, state-funded system of junior, four-year, and graduate colleges educated these new citizens, taught valuable job skills, and made postsecondary education available to all, at little-to-no cost. Television programs beamed into these homes featured the standard fare of the new medium: serials, dramas, comedies, game shows, sports, family entertainment, children's shows, in short, wholesome entertainment for the entire family.³⁰

Many biographies about Brian Wilson tell a story that "stands as one of the saddest and strangest in rock history."³¹ It is generally acknowledged that Brian responds to questions in, and of, the moment, and regularly contradicts himself. We should not be too focused on the fluidity of memory because the