

# CHECK THIS OUT!



# god only knows



Brian Wilson embarks on his first tour in over 30 years. Are there more pop classics on the horizon? Eric Beaumont tries to get the answers as Wilson rises again.

## Essential Wilson: Part 1



### **The Beach Boys Today** 1965 **Summer Days and Summer Nights** 1965

Two albums that foreshadowed the grace and soul of **Pet Sounds**. In addition to the hits “Help Me, Rhonda,” “When I Grow Up (To Be A Man)” and “Dance, Dance, Dance,” side two of **Today** (reportedly mixed under the heavy influence of pot) features tormented love songs of doubt and despair.



### **Pet Sounds** 1966

From the naivete of “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” to the emptiness of “Caroline, No” one of the most spiritual pieces of music ever written.



**Gerry Belsha**

Living in Milwaukee has its advantages: great, inexpensive restaurants; unique coffee shops; excellent independent bookstores; a lakefront undefiled by capitalist avarice; one of the great independent, format-free radio stations in the world; five operational landmark movie theaters that show great pictures; lots of cheap record stores; two free weekly independent newspapers; and being one of four cities Brian Wilson decided to play on his first planned tour in 31 years.

On Friday, March 12, Brian Wilson, architect of the Beach Boys, creator of some of the dreamiest pop ever pressed onto plastic, sensitive soul, drug/food/record company/psychological warfare casualty resurrected as vibrant artist, soul surviving member of his family, will play, backed by psychedelic Los Angeles quartet the

Wondermints, at the Pabst Theatre. Believe it. He has fallen, he has risen.

The reason for the tour? **Imagination**, a listenable, confident album full of cool melodies and good harmonies (some featuring as many as 96 vocal tracks, all singing by Wilson), co-produced by ersatz-country hack Joe Thomas, released last year on EMI? Maybe. Maybe something else.

Last month Wilson talked freely and candidly from Los Angeles (where he stays when he's not living about an hour south of Milwaukee) about what inspires him, how he works, and why he works so goddamn hard to give you more of what you love.



Wilson at the controls during the recording of Pet Sounds

**Check This Out!:** How do you stay in good voice?

**Brian Wilson:** Well, I practice a lot. You know, I'm always singing in my house. So, for that reason, I keep my voice in good

shape.

**CTO:** Is practice something that you naturally do, or do you have to set a schedule?

**BW:** Oh, no. No. I'm at the piano all the time.

## Essential Wilson: Part 2

**Smile** 1967



After **Pet Sounds**, Wilson worked on the single, "Good Vibrations," eventually releasing it near the end of 1966. **Smile** was to be the next great leap forward. Although never officially released, (and only Wilson knows exactly what he envisioned) the bootlegs and other songs and snippets available from this time period are breathtaking. Check out "Surf's Up" and quiver.

**Wild Honey** 1967



The Beach Boys' r&b record. Carl Wilson shows off his soul. Many consider "Darlin'" to be Carl Wilson's best vocal performance.

**I Just Wasn't Made For These Times**

1995



The best of the latter day Brian Wilson. Sparse and down to earth, it gives a glimpse of what he is still capable of doing.

Gerry Belsha

**CTO:** This tour would sort of indicate to your fans that you've reemerged spiritually.

**BW:** Yeah, that's exactly the case, the spiritual part of it.

**CTO:** So you must be feeling pretty good.

**BW:** I'm feeling pretty good these days, yeah. I'm pretty happy.

**CTO:** How do you feel when people bandy about the term 'genius' with reference to your work?

**BW:** Well, I did **Pet Sounds**.

They called **Pet Sounds** such genius production.

**CTO:** But you've made other records that inspired people to say that, you know.

**BW:** Yeah, I know. [laughing:] I just would guess it's in my blood after hearing Phil Spector's records.

**CTO:** So who's the genius? You or Phil? Or both?

**BW:** No, I'm just saying that, as soon as you hear his records, you're a genius, too! [more laughter]

**CTO:** OK, so it's a contact genius sort of thing. What has kept you going, continuing to make music while so many others have fallen prey to drugs, depression, and defeatism?

**BW:** My ambition and my will power. I have the will to succeed and live in my name, my last name. Brian wills on, you know? I do have that name. It keeps me going, you know.

**CTO:** Do you see your own will to live as revolutionary in any sense?

**BW:** It's not revolutionary; it's just probably hereditary. It's very natural. It's not a forced or a feigned thing at all.

**CTO:** It must have been limiting in some sense, with your



Phil Spector

**'As soon as you hear Phil Spector's records, you're a genius, too.'** - Brian Wilson

band having this image as fun-loving beachcombers on the make and having to accommodate five-part harmonies all the time. Was that a challenge to you or was it a setback?

**BW:** It was a challenge. No, I wanted to get down to it, to the nitty gritty, the real nitty gritty, and do it right. We worked our devils' asses off. We worked hard.

**CTO:** Do your writing habits depend on your mood at all?

**BW:** Oh, absolutely. My mood shifts go "Fp, thsssw," [laughs] my mood shifts go quite often. When I catch an inspired mood shift, I go right to the goddamn piano and write a song, or I just try.

**CTO:** So can you write if you're feeling good and/or feeling bad?

**BW:** Yeah. I can write feeling good or bad -- both, yeah.

**CTO:** And in between -- how's that?

**BW:** Depression, mostly. See, if I'm not into something, I feel depressed.

**CTO:** So feeling nothing is worse than feeling good or bad.

**BW:** That's right, that's right.

**CTO:** Have you written songs on other instruments besides piano or guitar?

**BW:** Usually it's piano. Ninety-five percent of the time it's piano. I went and wrote on [electronic] keyboard for a while, then went back to piano!

**CTO:** Some people find songwriting inspiration in experience or sensation or things that they take in.

**BW:** It's spiritual experience, yeah. To write a song, yeah. - one of my songs.

**CTO:** Do you ever find that a song just comes out, regardless of what's going on outside of you?

**BW:** Aaaaah, I don't know.

Probably.

**CTO: Yeah? You do have a pretty strong work ethic, you know. How many songs do you write a day?**

**BW:** Oh, come on! I try. I go to the piano 10 times a day; I don't write a song but once every month. Every couple of months. Anything good, you mean? Anything good or real?

**CTO: Yeah.**

**BW:** Probably once every two months.

**CTO: OK. How many songs have you got recorded, including demos, that are not released?**

**BW:** Oh, I don't know!  
[laughs] I wouldn't have any idea.

**CTO: If you had to take a guess.**

**BW:** Two hundred and fifty.

**CTO: How far back would you say your influences go? I know you're always talking about the Four Freshmen.**

**BW:** Freshmen, Rosemary Clooney, Phil Spector, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Andy Williams, and Perry Como.

**CTO: You haven't got any older influence like Ellington or Armstrong?**

**BW:** No.

**CTO: So it's pretty much late '40s and onward, huh?**

**BW:** Pretty much so, yeah.

**CTO: With whom would you collaborate if you could? I'm talking anybody, alive or dead.**

**BW:** Paul McCartney. Hahaah!

**CTO: Any chance of that happening?**

**BW:** Sure. I think so. I think, since he lost his wife, I think he would be interested in getting into something good, you know, just take it off his chest.

**CTO: Are you in touch with him?**

**BW:** No, but a friend of mine is, and we might get together. You never know.

**CTO: Have you heard any of these newer artists that claim you as an influence, like Pizzicato Five from Japan or Saint Etienne from England?**

**BW:** Yeah, I understand that they emulate some of the Beach Boys' music.

**CTO: Yeah, they do. Have you heard 'em?**

**BW:** Some of it, yeah.

**CTO: What do you think?**

**BW:** I'm impressed! I'm very impressed.

**CTO: What's the best new band that you've heard?**

**BW:** Um, probably Steven Tyler's group.

**CTO: Aerosmith?**

**BW:** Yeah!

**CTO: Whoa! You're not supposed to say that!**

**BW:** Yeah!

**CTO: What's your favorite song of your own, from the new LP?**

**BW:** I like "Happy Days" the most.

**CTO: How about from the first solo LP [Brian Wilson, produced by Wilson's therapist, Dr. Eugene Landy, who assumed way too much writing credit and saturated the album with crappy drum machines and cheesy synthetic keyboard sounds, released by Sire in 1988]?**

**BW:** On the first solo LP I liked "Love and Mercy."

**CTO: How about your favorite Beach Boys song?**

**BW:** My favorite Beach Boys

song? "California Girls."

**CTO: And your favorite song ever by anyone?**

**BW:** Probably "Be My Baby" by Phil Spector [and Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, sung by the Ronettes] would be my favorite.

**CTO: Was it a thrill for you when you got to work with Hal Blaine, the guy who drummed on that record?**

**BW:** Oh, God, yes! Are you kidding? Of course! I just flipped out! I was flipped.

**CTO: Have you collaborated in the last five years or so with some of your old musical comrades like Hal Blaine or Carole Kaye or Glen Campbell?**

**BW:** Yeah, about four years ago I worked with Hal and Carole on Carnie and Wendy's album (**The Wilsons**, released 1997 on Mercury, featuring famous Wilson



Hal Blaine

daughters singing a remake of Brian's "'Til I Die," an intriguing number entitled, "I Hate Your Face," and others). I helped. I produced a couple cuts. I got to see Hal and Carole.

**CTO: In pop music there's a fundamental lie that you tell your audience: every time you're in love it's this spectacular experience of fireworks going off. You can't afford even one second of indecision and it's all brilliant and beautiful and glorious and if there's any trouble you get out. You're aware of this problem, right?**

**BW:** Right.

**CTO: Now your songwriting has progressed to the point where 'love' means something when you put it next to the word 'mercy.'**

**BW:** Right!

**CTO: But you're still chasing the same thing you were when you were 17, which is perfection. When I found out that Smokey Robinson wasn't really telling the truth, it's almost like finding out Santa Claus isn't real. It's terrible in a way, but, well, you're growing up.**

**BW:** Right.

**CTO: So what's your angle on**



Carl Wilson

**the problem of love as depicted in pop music?**

**BW:** Well, I think that love will never be an overused word, for one thing. And for another thing, love is probably just as important as breathing in life. You're born with the need to be loved. You study any psychology in your life and you'll know that that's just one of the laws of life. I did some [study] in junior college. I read some books.

**CTO: What's your best memory of your brother Carl [who died last year of lung cancer]?**

**BW:** When we got together and prayed for people when we made **Pet Sounds**. We prayed that we could bring an album into existence that would bring people a lot of love. The whole group did the album, but for the prayer sessions ... it was just Carl and me.

**CTO: What's your proudest memory of him?**

**BW:** When he sang "Darlin'" -- that was remarkable. And "God Only Knows."

**CTO: What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you in the studio?**

**BW:** The time I wore a toy fireman's hat. I went in to produce a record with a fireman's hat on.

**CTO: I've heard that one before. You've got to give me another one. How about onstage?**

**BW:** Well, I could tell you something that happened to Mike [Love, who currently leads a band that calls itself the Beach Boys and features no other founding members of the Beach Boys]. He grabbed two microphones from two different circuits. And he's going, "Uhh! Uhh! Uh!" and everybody goes, "Ah, ha, ha" -- thought he was



Beach Boys, 1966

joking around, right?

**CTO: Good grief!**

**BW:** All of a sudden somebody goes, "Hey, he's not stopping," so Al Jardine took his foot and knocked one of the microphones out of Mike's hands. And Mike fell on the floor for a second. God, everybody was scared to death. We thought he got electrocuted.

**CTO: When was this?**

**BW:** Nineteen sixty-four. We thought he got electrocuted, you know what I mean? But he didn't. It was funny, but it was very shocking, too.

**CTO: I just picked up 15 Big Ones [an atrociously bad Beach Boys album from 1976, with contributions from Daryl Dragon, a/k/a Toni Tenille's Captain, and some amazingly limp remakes of rock & roll classics like Little Willie John's "Talk to Me, Talk to Me" and Chuck Berry's "Rock and Roll Music," with the infamous stadium chant, "RAWK! ROLL! RAWK AND ROLL!"].**

**BW:** Yeah.

**CTO: There's a song on there where the vocal is very, very rough, yet there's a very naked, very human emotion that comes through. It's a cover of**

**a Righteous Brothers tune. Do you know the one?**

**BW:** "Just Once In My Life"? Now there's a cut.

**CTO: What went into that song? Why does that stand out to you like it does to me?**

**BW:** Because the lyrics are saying, "Please, once in my life, let me get what I want" - - it's like heart and soul, you know? Heart and soul lives!

**CTO: Here comes the million dollar question: for God's sake, why don't you produce yourself?**

**BW:** Because I need inspiration. I need to work with people, you know what I mean? Not that I'm lazy, it's just that when I collaborate, sometimes, it just works out better for me that way.

**- Eric Beaumont**



**Check This Out!  
tastes great**