SURF MUSIC
By Geoffrey Himes

It often seems that the United States is a pool table that has been tilted so all its hopes and dreams roll to the west. Whenever Americans want a new and better life, they head toward the setting sun. Whether it was the white-canvas covered wagons of the 1850s, the rusty Okie jalopies of the 1930s or the painted hippie vans of the 1960s, the direction is always westward—and eventually they collect in the pool table's corner pocket known as Southern California. When Chuck Berry went chasing after his imagined utopia in the song "Promised Land," where did he end up? Los Angeles.

Thousands of Hollywood movies had advertised Southern California as a nirvana of palm trees, sunshine, beautiful girls and beautiful boys, convincing folks from Oklahoma, Kansas and Ohio to pack up and move to the coast. By the end of the 1950s, the area around L.A. was full of almost as many transplanted Midwesterners as native Californians. The natives knew the region was no utopia, but the first and second-generation immigrants, these strangers in paradise, still clung to the notion of America's western edge as the place where their dreams might come true. The teens and twentysomethings in these families—too young and too new to the West Coast to be disillusioned—turned that utopian impulse into a new kind of rock'n'roll: surf music.

Brian, Dennis and Carl Wilson, whose father and mother had moved to California from Kansas and Minnesota respectively, formed the Beach Boys. They were joined by their first cousin Mike Love, whose parents had arrived from Louisiana and Kansas. Bruce Johnston, who was half of Bruce & Terry and the producer of the Rip Chords before joining the Beach Boys, moved from Chicago to Los Angeles as a young boy. The Honeys, the female surf group that included Brian Wilson's wife-to-be Marilyn Rovell, moved from Chicago as teens. Richard Monsour, the teenager who would become Dick Dale, the "King of the Surf Guitar," was a high school student when his family moved from Massachusetts to California.

These families came from somewhere else, in "pursuit of happiness," as the American Declaration of Independence had promised them. The parents, raised in the hardship of the Great Depression in the '30s and the horrors of World War II, saw happiness as a distant goal that you earned with hard work and cautious saving. The children, raised in the affluence of the post-war '50s, saw happiness a birthright, a gratification that shouldn't be delayed. It was as if the parents were still living in 1940s Kansas, while the kids were already living in 1960s California, and by some accident of history were sharing the same 1950s suburbs of Los Angeles.

By the early '60s, the teenagers in these families were describing this "pursuit of happiness" in two different kinds of surf music. The instrumental surf music—first articulated by Dick Dale and later echoed by the Marketts, Surfaris, Ventures, Chantays, Pyramids, Crossfires, Belairs and

Astronauts—was all about the “pursuit." Driven by propulsive rhythms and sizzling with amplifier noise, these tunes captured the pell-mell motion of going after youthful desires. The vocal surf music—defined by the Beach Boys and emulated by Jan & Dean, the Honeys, the Fantastic Baggys, the Sunrays and the Rip Chords—captured “happiness” itself, the stacked harmonies recreating the glow of desire satisfied.

Few songs capture irrepressible desire better than Dick Dale & the Del-Tones’ 1962 single, “Miserlou." Dale bursts out of the gate with a galloping run of 16th notes on his Fender Stratocaster with just enough syncopation to keep the tune leaning ever forward. Each note was soaked in reverb, like the sound of notes bouncing off the walls of a teenager's private refuge, the bedroom—or off the wave towering above a surfer as he crouched on a board. Dale was a die-hard surfer himself, and he wanted to translate that experience into song: the roar of the ocean, the splash of the foam, the vibration of board as it surges beachward.

He found the perfect vehicle in an old Greek folk song called “Misirlou." For Dale, the former Richard Monsour, was an immigrant twice over—once as part of a Lebanese-American family new to the U.S. and then as a New England ethnic new to the melting-pot beach culture of Southern California. He remembered hearing his father and uncle play “Misirlou” in Arab-American nightclubs, and the exoticism of the tune’s Mideastern intervals seemed perfect for the eerie feeling of riding a big wave—always on the brink of disaster even as one is taken for a thrill of a ride.

Dale Americanized the song by speeding it up and Californized it by amping it up. He respelled it “Miserlou” and released it as his third single on his father's Del-Tone Records. Amid whoops of excitement, it begins with low, fat-toned notes, mimicking the early curl of a wave. Half a minute later, Dale’s guitar leaps up an octave, spraying trebly notes like the wave’s bubbly crest. Half a minute after that, a trumpet solo (played by Dale as well) suggests the dizzying momentum as the board picks up speed. Half a minute after that the guitar reappears, joined this time by manic piano and pounding drums. After two minutes and 11 seconds of breathless motion, it's over.

This was the song, more than Dale’s first two singles, that captured the lunge of wanting. It appealed not just to the kids who actually surfed but also to every young person who had recklessly chased after desire. But if this was the sound of chasing after gratification, what was the sound of grasping it?

There's no better answer than the Beach Boys’ 1964 album track, “Girls on the Beach," as utopian a song as American pop has given us. Mike Love's lyrics describe an inviting California scene where nearly naked young girls and nearly naked young boys sprawl across large towels on the sand as the surf rolls in—“the sun in her hair, the warmth of the air, on a summer day.” But it's Brian Wilson's music that sells the vision, the impossible promise that “the girls on the beach are all within reach."

The song opens with a swell of voices, all yearning, wordless vowels from Brian’s younger brothers Dennis and Carl, from their first cousin Mike and from Brian’s college pal Al Jardine. From within these tightly bunched, close-interval harmonies, Brian’s falsetto shoots upward like a sudden spurt of desire, crying, “The girls on the beach." The studio musicians then come in with circling triplets,

propelled by the reverb-heavy tone and percussive clicks that defined the surf-guitar sound. The melody was a simple up-down-up-down pattern that any teenager could sing along with, but the chord changes—the one to the sixth-minor to the ninth-minor-seventh to the one to the sixth-minor-seventh to the ninth-minor-seventh to the fourth—filled the simple tune with deep longing.

And then, halfway through the first verse, the song suddenly modulates half a step upward, as if the sight of those tanning, bikini-clad teens had triggered a flood of hormones and adrenaline that made the vocalists sing a little higher. The device has a similar effect on the listener, pushing one out of a safe assumption about the song's key and pattern into a disorienting giddiness, and a sense that anything is indeed possible. When the group croons, “The girls on the beach are all within reach if you know what to do," the listener is ready to believe in this far-fetched utopia if only because the chord progression traced by the stacked vocals pulls the listener into its downward dive on the single syllable of “do."

The fact that this enticing vision of a shoreline paradise where every desire is easily fulfilled was created by one rock'n'roll’s most dysfunctional, unhappiest families doesn’t negate its appeal. If anything, the contrast between the utopian dream of the singers’ perfect performance and the dystopian reality of their lives only sharpens the song's impact, for it explains why these five men in their teens and early 20s—including the three sons and nephew of a frustrated, Kansas-born machinist—needed so desperately to believe in California's promised land.

Out of that need came surf music. Most musical histories will have you believe that new sounds and new movements are the result of visionary artists. If you look closer, though, you find it isn’t the artists who create new styles; it’s the audiences. It wasn’t Dick Dale and Brian Wilson who invented surf music. It was the young listeners—first in Southern California but soon all across the country and then in Europe and Australia—who needed to hear the sound of utopia and its pursuit. Those fans couldn’t make the sound themselves, but they recognized it when they heard it and with that enthusiasm guided the musicians down the right path.

Because Dale didn’t set out to become a guitar instrumentalist. He wanted to be Elvis Presley. He got his first break in 1956 when he won an Elvis Presley Sound-Alike contest in Los Angeles. He even played an Elvis-like character in Marilyn Monroe’s 1960 film, “Let's Make Love.” Dale bought his first reverb unit not for his guitar but to make his voice sound like Elvis’s in the Sun Studios’ echo chamber.

His eventual status as King of the Surf Guitar “came from the kids I went surfing with,” he says in the liner notes for his *Better Shred Than Dead* box set. “They’d say, ‘You’re the king, man; you’re the king of the surf and the surf guitar. It was not self-imposed or self-proclaimed. Everything I did was a product of the people."

Likewise, Brian Wilson didn’t set out to be a surf-music singer. Hell, he didn’t even surf. He wanted to be a composer like George Gershwin or an arranger like Stan Kenton. His role models were the Four Freshmen. But that's not what his audience wanted. His audience—at first his brothers, cousin and

high school friends, then young audiences around the L.A. area, then screaming fans at tour stops all over the U.S.—wanted music as exciting as the surf instrumentals that Dale was playing at the nearby Rendezvous Ballroom and as sumptuous at the three-minute teen operas Phil Spector was constructing at the nearby Gold Star Studios. So that's what Brian gave them.

It didn't matter that Brian never surfed or hot-rodded. He didn't have to go to South Bay where the waves were perfect or to the Bonneville Salt Flats where the drag racing was unimpeded. Because utopia wasn't to be found at South Bay or Bonneville; it was to be found at his father's piano. That's where he spent hours as a teenager, discovering that if you could make all the musical conflicts between different notes resolve into satisfying harmonies, that satisfaction could make you believe you could resolve the conflicts in the rest of your life. The stories that his brother Dennis and his cousin Mike told about the beach merely provided a setting and characters for that utopian quest. His brother Carl's fascination with surf guitar and Mike's experience with R&B harmonies merely provided a musical vocabulary for that pursuit.

"Brian, in fact, did stay home and create a whole world at the piano," agreed Carl. "Brian made this whole picture, and people were mad to get to California. There was an awe connected to California and the way we lived. But it wasn't the real California so much as the California in Brian's songs."

Maybe Brian didn't surf, but Dick Dale did. His family moved to El Segundo, California, in 1954, in time for Dick's senior year of high school. Like so many in his generation, it wasn't enough for him to chase dreams to the very edge of the continent; he had to go a little further, into the waves. Soon he was bursting out of high school at the last bell and heading for the nearby beaches with a surfboard in his car.

This was back before surfing became a national fad, back when a few Californians pursued the obscure Polynesian sport with the zeal of any small group onto a good thing. The sport had been around so long that British explorer Captain Cook saw examples when he visited Tahiti in 1777 and Hawaii in 1778. But as so often happens, Americans transformed a cultural tradition with new technology. While the Polynesians used heavy hardwood boards that required a surfer to be a muscleman, Californians experimented with lighter boards—first of balsa wood and then of polyurethane—that allowed slender teenagers and even girls to join the sport. Suddenly it wasn't about strength as much as agility.

This democratized the sport, and soon Southern California adolescents were surfing next to the World War II veterans who had picked up the habit in the Pacific. Not unlike skateboarding in the 1980s, surfing in the 1950s was a slightly disreputable subculture with its own rituals, slang and fetishes about equipment. But it had one thing that skateboarding didn't: an intense bonding with nature.

"It's a wonderful, spiritual experience," Dale said, "to stand in the water at five a.m. and face the majesty of those waves. When you witness the power of Mother Nature that way, it makes you humble. When I was in the water, the rumble of the ocean and roll of the waves, you hear this

tremendous sound of Mother Nature. You paddle out to a 15-footer, stand up, and the wave comes over your head, going tiddle-tiddly-dee. Then you're sucked down in a roll in a big roar. So I played like that."

In his attempts to recreate those sounds of surfing on his electric guitar, Dale invented a whole new way of playing. To reproduce the "tiddle-tiddly-dee" of the ocean spray, he developed a staccato eighth-note picking style. To replicate the rumbling roar of the undertow, he played the fattest strings he could buy on the fullest sounding amplifiers he could find. To mimic the rise, fall and forward momentum of the waves, he led his rhythm section through fast, rolling phrases.

The Beach Boys' Carl Wilson, one of Dale's most important disciples, revealed the technique: "You play the melody down in a lower register. You play an up stroke on the one-and beat, but everything else is down. To get that clipped sound, you mute the strings a bit with the palm of your picking hand; that gives it a more percussive sound. These kids would buy these huge Marshall amps, crank them up and those simple little melodies would just roar. But Dick Dale was different from the rest, because he had more control and more bite. Ooh, Dick Dale; that's who you wanted to sound like if you were a guitarist in L.A. in those years."

Just as Californians transformed the surfboard with technology, they did the same with the electric guitar. To get the sound in his head, Dale kept trying to make his guitar louder, because when a guitar gets louder it not only increases in volume but it also changes its tone. The overtones become easier to hear at higher volumes, and the tone acquires that resonant, buzzing sound.

In nearby Fullerton, California, a Greek-American named Leo Fender invented a solid-body guitar called the Stratocaster in 1954. That got Dale closer to his goal, but the amplifiers couldn't handle the volume he wanted. So the teenager went to Fender directly and asked for bigger speakers. Fender, always eager to experiment with working musicians, started giving Dale amplifiers and he blew up dozens of them. Finally, to satisfy the demanding youngster, Fender built a 15-inch speaker with a 100-watt transformer that he called the Showman amp. At last Dale was pleased. He bought six of the amps, stacked them and blasted the crowds at the Rendezvous. He claims, not without cause, that this was the birth of hard rock.

In the 1963 movie "A Swingin' Affair," you can see Dale play "Miserlou" backed by a six-man version of the Del-Tones in tan blazers and surrounded by college students doing the twist in suits and gowns. Dale himself, in a dark blazer and swept-back dark hair, plays a left-handed white Stratocaster, hammering out staccato notes on the thickest, lowest string before shifting to the higher strings for the retooled Greek melody. The Del-Tones swayed as they stuck to a midtempo Latin beat that made it seem as if they were driving a pick-up truck as Dale zoomed by them in a sports car.

Latin rhythms were ultimately more important to surf music than Greek melodies, for it was the Mexican-American acts in L.A.—Ritchie Valens, Chan Romero, Thee Midnighters, the Champs—that showed the way when it came to revved-up guitar music with that unlikely combination of staccato attack and fat tone. These Chicano families had come from a different direction, but like the

Midwesterners crowding into Southern California the Mexicans had come for the same reason: pursuit of a better life. And their teenagers were turning that desire into guitar-dominated records with a can’t-wait, let's-go propulsion.

These Chicano youngsters had plenty of connections with the nascent surf scene. The Champs’ #1 instrumental single, “Tequila," anticipated Dale’s instrumentals in its mix of insistent riffs and full-bodied guitar tone. The tune was written by Chuck Rio (aka Danny Flores) and featured his New Orleans-style sax riff and his mariachi-inspired yelping. Later line-ups for the Champs included James Seals and Dash Crofts as well as future Beach Boy Glen Campbell. When Valens had his big hits with “La Bamba” and “Donna” in 1958, he played his first out-of-the-neighborhood show with Dale in Long Beach—and even shared a manager with Dale for a while. The ties between the two scenes were so close that when Dale played his trumpet solo on the recorded version of “Miserlou," it greatly echoed mariachi music.

Another key influence is usually overlooked. The harsh segregation of New Orleans and an ongoing crackdown on French Quarter night clubs in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s caused some of the best musicians in America to migrate en masse to Los Angeles. These African-American players, who had played behind everyone from Earl Hines to Fats Domino, were seeking a better life in California’s promised land as much as the Wilson family or the Monsour family were.

The transplanted Louisiana musicians soon became regulars at L.A. studios and lent a second-line syncopation to many of their dates, including many Phil Spector sessions. Rene Hall played lead guitar on Valens’ “Come On, Let’s Go” and Romero’s “Hippy Hippy Shake." Earl Palmer played the famous drum introduction to Jan & Dean’s “Surf City." Plas Johnson played the tenor saxophone lead on the Beach Boys’ “Let’s Go Away for Awhile." Palmer and a bunch of his fellow Louisianans called themselves the Marketts to record “Surfer's Stomp."

In 1961 Dale started playing for his surfer pals at the Rinky Dink Ice Cream Parlor in Balboa, California. He quickly outgrew that and his business-minded father rented out the Rendezvous Ballroom, a huge palace from the big-band era, right on the beach at the end of the peninsula. Only 17 paying customers showed up for the first show on July 1, but within four months 3,000 youngsters were crowding into the Rendezvous every Friday and Saturday, slapping their sandals on the hardwood floor, creating a dance they called the “stomp."

This success led Dale’s father to start his own Del-Tone label and release the instrumental "Let's Go Tripping." The single sold enough copies in Dale’s Southern California stronghold to reach #60 on the national charts. It was the first true surf-music record, the first to transmute the sound of Mexican-American rock'n'roll into the brittle staccato, heavy reverb and tricky solos of Dale’s personal vision. It was also the first to evoke the sensation of trying to stay atop a surfboard as it hurtled beachward, and nearly everyone in the California surf scene—both the hard core and the wanna-bes—recognized their own experience in that sound and responded accordingly.

On the strength of that success, Capitol Records signed Dale for a $50,000 advance, more money, albeit in 1961 dollars, than RCA had paid for Elvis Presley, and released five albums by Dale between 1961 and 1965. None of the songs became big hits, not even “Miserlou," and Dale claims none of the records ever captured his real sound. But Dale’s lack of success on the national charts shouldn’t distract one from recognizing his dominance According to every witness on the scene, as L.A.’s top live act from 1961 through 1963. Virtually every act mentioned in this chapter—including the Beach Boys—launched their career as an opening act for Dale.

"I was never recorded properly," he insisted. "I was always fighting with engineers who'd tell you how many years they'd been in school, how you couldn't do this and you couldn't do that. So I did what they said, and when I heard the records, I hated them and smashed them against the wall. At a certain point, I got fed up and said, `If people are going to hear me, they're only going to hear the way I sound on stage.' So I quit recording."

That may be true, but it didn’t help that Dale refused to tour, because he didn’t want to leave behind his surfboard and his growing menagerie of exotic animals - lions, tigers, ocelots, cougars and hawks. Nor did it help that he was diagnosed with rectal cancer in 1967 (at age 29) and had to retire from music for a while. It was left to his imitators to reap the commercial rewards of his musical breakthroughs.

Typical of those imitators were the Surfaris. These high school pals from Glendora High School near L.A. were big Dick Dale fans and actual surfers. They entered Cucamonga’s Pal Studios in December, 1962, to record an awkward pop ditty, a tribute to “a big beach blondie named Surfer Joe.” They needed a flip side, so guitarist Jim Fuller offered his instrumental “Stiletto,” a transparent rewrite of Dale’s “Let's Go Tripping." Fuller's song needed something to distinguish it, so producer Dale Smallen retitled the number “Wipe Out,” added his maniacal falsetto yelp and asked guitarist Bob Berryhill’s dad to crack a roofing tile by the microphone to imitate the sound of a surfboard breaking apart in a big wave.

“Wipe Out” still needed something else, and Smallen asked the Surfaris’ Ron Wilson to add a drum break. Wilson speeded up a drum roll that he had learned in his high school marching band; Smallen poured reverb over the whole thing, and the result was the best-selling surf-instrumental record in history: a #2 hit for the Surfaris in 1963, a #16 hit for the Surfaris again in 1966, and a #12 hit for the Fat Boys and the Beach Boys when they recorded it as a rapping surf song in 1987. The Surfaris went on to make several interesting albums with Beach Boys associate Gary Usher, but they are forever linked to their one hit.

The Chantays were friends at Santa Ana High School when they too came to Pal Studios to record an instrumental they called “Pipeline." Guitarists Bob Spickard and Brian Carman had just bought a Dick Dale reverb units that they applied to a melody with echoes of “Miserlou." They were better musicians than the Surfaris, and Spickard’s 16th-note, descending run on the intro evoked the “tiddle-tiddly-dee” of the waves that Dale talks about. Alternating between low-register rumbles and high-register

splatters, Spickard captured the rise and fall of the waves. “Pipeline” was a #4 single nationally, but the Chantays too were one-hit wonders.

The Pyramids of Long Beach scored a #18 single with “Penetration" in 1964. The Bel-Airs had a local hit with “Mr. Moto," a surf instrumental with a strong Mexican flavor. The band’s drummer Richard Delvy went on to co-found the Challengers, while Bel-Airs guitarist Eddie Bertrand founded Eddie and the Showmen. The Crossfires were another L.A. surf band, but they are mostly remembered for evolving into the Turtles. Though Dale and the Beach Boys are the acts we remember today, you can’t get an accurate notion of the surf-music scene of the early ‘60s until you realize that there were dozens of surf bands gigging and recording in Southern California at the same time.]

Before long, Dale’s sound was being imitated by youngsters far from California. The Astronauts from Boulder, Colorado, had a #94 hit with “Baja” in 1963. The Trashmen from Minneapolis, Minnesota, had a #4 hit with "Surfin' Bird" in 1964. Sydney’s Atlantics even had a #1 hit on the Australian charts with “Bombora” in 1963. There aren’t a lot of surfing opportunities in Colorado or Minnesota, so these new fans weren’t captivated by the sport so much as by the sound of living-in-the-moment that Dale presented. It sounded like the promised land to them.

The Ventures of Tacoma, Washington, had already had a #2 hit with “Walk—Don’t Run” in 1960 before Dale ever released a surf record. But because they were pursuing a similar brand of fat-toned, drum-roll-filled, staccato-phrased guitar instrumentals, they were inevitably influenced by Dale's innovations. The Ventures retitled “Spudnik," their earlier, mispelled, ode to the Russian satellite, as “Surf Rider” and included it on their 1963 album, *Surfing* (which also included covers of the Chantays’ “Pipeline” and the Beach Boys’ “The Lonely Sea”).

The Ventures even rearranged their first hit in the Dale style and reissued it as “Walk—Don’t Run ’64.” The new version went to #8. They also charted with such surf-flavored singles as 1965's “Diamond Head," 1966's “Action Head” and 1969’s “Hawaii Five-O," the theme from the popular TV show. The Ventures had more business savvy than the other surf-guitar bands and went on to enjoy the most successful career of any instrumental rock act in history.

Usually an artist has a big hit only after they encounter their major influence. But the Ventures had a hit before they ever heard of Dale, their most crucial role model, and Jan & Dean had a hit before the Beach Boys even existed. Jan Berry, Dean Torrence and Arnie Ginsburg were friends at Emerson High School who played in a band called the Barons (which included Sandy Nelson on drums and Bruce Johnston on piano at one point). In 1957 the trio of Berry, Torrence and Ginsburg wrote an ode to Ginsburg’s favorite stripper, “Jennie Lee," and recorded it in Berry's garage on the two-track recorder he had just gotten for his 16th birthday.

“Jennie Lee” was in no way a surf song but rather a doo-wop number in the mode of the Crows and the Chords. It was a catchy one, however, and leapt to #8 on the national charts. Because Torrence was away in the U.S. Army Reserve, the single was released under the name of Jan & Arnie. When Torrence returned from the service and Ginsburg quit, the name became Jan & Dean. There were

more hits in the same doo-wop vein: the #10 “Baby Talk” in 1959, the #25 “Heart and Soul” in 1961 and the #28 “Linda” in 1963. The latter is noteworthy because it had been written in 1947 about lawyer Lee Eastman's five-year-old daughter. That daughter grew up to become Linda McCartney, the wife of Paul and his bandmate in Wings.

Berry was the driving force behind the duo; Torrence sang the dizzying high parts, but Berry did most of the lead singing, writing, arranging and producing. He was experimenting with bouncing tracks from one tape recorder to another to create echo effects and to layer harmonies as he searched for a lushness that might echo the grand adolescent hopes in his head. He could hear that sound, but he couldn’t quite grasp it, though he felt he was getting closer all the time. So you can imagine his surprise when he discovered that a shy kid no one had ever heard of had gotten there before him.

That kid was Brian Wilson. He lived at 3701 W. 119th St. in a lower-middle-class housing development in Hawthorne, a Los Angeles suburb five miles inland. It was a modest place of neatly mowed lawns, sidewalks and $2000 two-bedroom homes. Brian's father Murry made his living as a machinist but really wanted to be a songwriter. He’d had tasted just enough success (his songs had been recorded by the Hollywood Flames and by Bob Wills’ brother Johnnie Lee and had been performed on TV by Lawrence Welk) to whet his appetite.

“My dad was a part-time songwriter,” remembered Carl, “and we always had a couple pianos in the house and a jukebox. We had a garage that my dad fixed up into a den. We’d all get around the piano; my mom would play, and later Brian started to play. By 10, he could already play great boogie-woogie piano.”

As Brian entered high school, he became more proficient at the piano and grew fascinated with the Four Freshmen. He would sit for hours at the piano, picking out each part in their West Coast jazz. cool-jazz vocal arrangements. To replicate those parts, he would drill his brother, mother and cousin for hours until they got each part just right. Carl and Mike quickly learned how to hear a part and stick to it, no matter what else was going on around it. This would prove invaluable a few years later when the Beach Boys were executing Brian’s own, equally complicated compositions.

“I liked writing music for them because they were such great singers," Brian reflected later. “I had to teach them how to sing on pitch. I did it one guy at time, teaching them parts. They could sing anything, and that made it easier to write for them, because I knew they could do anything I wrote."

“Everyone senses his part,” Carl added. “When Brian would present a song to us, we would almost know what our part would be. Michael always sang the bottom; I would sing the one above that, then would come Dennis or Alan, and then Brian on top. We had a feeling for it. Michael has a beautifully rich, very full-sounding bass voice. Yet his lead singing is real nasal, real punk. Alan’s voice has a bright timbre to it; it really cuts. My voice has a kind of calm sound. We’re big oooh-ers; we love to oooh. It’s a big, full sound, that’s very pleasing to us; it opens up the heart.”

“Brian took something from all of us," Jardine affirmed. “That’s the secret of the harmony, because he uses us like instruments. He can see those qualities and draw them out.”

Those songs wouldn’t be jazz, however; they would be rock'n'roll. In 1961 there were no examples of 19-year-old California kids having success with sophisticated jazz, but the 20-year-old Jan Berry and 21-year-old Dean Torrence were singing rock'n'roll hits, and the 21-year-old Phil Spector had already produced hits for the Teddy Bears, Ray Peterson and Curtis Lee. Dick Dale, Carl's guitar hero, was drawing huge crowds at the Rendezvous Ballroom. Mike’s favorite R&B groups—Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Flamingos and the Dell-Vikings—were exploring vocal harmonies not so far removed from the Four Freshmen.

“One time I was down the street at a friend’s," Carl recalled, “and we were in the backyard, and the radio came on with Little Richard’s ‘Tutti Frutti.’ I thought I was going to jump out my skin; the record was so alive and energetic, I couldn’t believe my ears. My dad used to say, ‘Turn it off; he sounds like he’s going insane.’"

So Brian channeled his musical ambitions into an unprecedented blend of surf guitar and doo-wop harmonies. It was the same story you’ll find in every chapter in this book: An eccentric genius, an outlier talent, collides with a loose-knit community and each transforms the other to create a new kind of music. Elvis Presley wants to be Dean Martin, but he collides with Memphis’ blues-loving hepcats and creates rockabilly instead. Bob Dylan wants to be Elvis Presley, but he collides with New York’s folk-music community and creates folk-rock instead. Paul McCartney wants to be Little Richard, but he collides with Liverpool’s beat fans and creates the British Invasion instead. Brian Wilson wants to be George Gershwin, but he collides with California’s beach scene and creates surf music instead.

It’s true that we would never have remembered these communities if a genius hadn’t come along to give them a special sound. But it’s just as true that we wouldn’t remember these geniuses if there hadn’t been a community to give a specific shape to that sound and a supportive fan base to let that sound evolve. If not for Brian Wilson, there wouldn’t be a surf-music chapter in this book. But without the precedent of Dick Dale, Jan & Dean and Phil Spector, without the precision voices of Carl Wilson, Mike Love and Al Jardine, without Mike’s R&B influence, without Dennis Wilson’s real-life surf stories, Brian couldn’t have possibly become “Brian Wilson."

Dennis had almost never taken part in the Wilson Family sing-alongs; he was too busy chasing waves, chasing girls and escaping his abusive father. He was in the band only because their mother, Audree, insisted that Brian allow his brother into his new group, the Pendletones (named after the Pendleton striped shirts that young Californians were wearing). As early as 1959, Brian, Carl and Mike had performed at Hawthorne High as Carl & the Passions. Brian had also been part of a Kingston-Trio-like group with Al Jardine, his friend at El Camino Junior College.

Brian knew rock'n'roll offered the best route to a music career, so he hauled his fledgling group to Guild Music, a small L.A. publishing company. During the meeting, Dennis exclaimed that surfing was such a fast-growing phenomenon that a song about the sport was sure to be a hit. In fact, he added,

his brother Brian had already written such a song: “Surfin’." Brian had done no such thing, but the publishers wanted to hear the song, and the youngsters agreed to rehearse it and return. Soon afterward, on Labor Day weekend of 1961, Murry and Audree went on a trip to Mexico City and left some food and emergency money behind for the boys.

“As soon as they left,” Carl divulged, “we all got into Brian’s car, went down to this music store on Hawthorne Avenue and used the money to rent some instruments: a big acoustic bass and a flashy looking Rickenbacker guitar. I already had my Kay guitar. We started bashing it out at the house, and it sounded horrible, because Brian and I were the only ones who could play. Singing was easy, but nobody could play rhythm. After all, I was just 14 and a sophomore in high school.”

This was their chance to actually create a song called “Surfin’.” Mike wrote some lyrics; Brian came up with a catchy melody and arranged the vocal harmonies, and Mike added a classic doo-wop phrase: “Ba-ba-dippity-dee." Mike sang the lead vocal with an edgy aggression that contrasted effectively with the smoother harmonies from Brian, Carl and Al. Though the Beach Boys are often caricatured as the ultimate white, suburban act, black R&B was crucial to their sound.

“Mike went to Dorsey High,” Carl pointed out, “and most of his classmates were black. He was the only white guy on his track team. He was really immersed in doo-wop and that music and I think he influenced Brian to listen to it. The black artists were so much better in terms of rock records in those days that the white records almost sounded like put-ons.”

When Murry returned home from Mexico, he was furious that his sons had spent the money on instruments. His fury was not to be underestimated; one of his punishments had left Brian deaf in one ear, and Carl used to hide under the bed when Murry was on the rampage. But the father was mollified when he heard “Surfin’” and realized that as the boys’ mentor he might yet have the musical career he’d always wanted.

Murry convinced Guild Music to finance a September 15 demo session. That led to an October 3 session at World Pacific Studios. The group had renamed itself the Surfers, but record distributor Russ Regan renamed them the Beach Boys, and Candix Records released “Surfin’” on December 8. Right before Christmas the group opened for Dick Dale at the Rendezvous Ballroom. By December 29, the single was in the top-40 on local station KFWB (it would eventually reach #2 in Los Angeles and #75 nationally). On New Year’s Eve, the Beach Boys followed Ike & Tina Turner at Long Beach Municipal Auditorium.

“Dennis was so thrilled,” Carl said, “because he was living it. He went to school and his friends said, ‘We were on our way home from the beach, totally exhausted from riding the waves all day. We heard your record come on, and it turned us on so much we went back to the beach.’ Dennis was the embodiment of the group; he lived what we were singing about. If it hadn’t been for Dennis, the group wouldn’t have happened in the same way. I mean, we could have gotten it from magazines like everyone else did, but Dennis was out there doing it. He made it true.”

“Surfin’” was undeniably catchy, even if it was primitive—the drum track consisted of Brian tapping on a snare drum with a pencil. Things were only slightly better on the February 8, 1962, session that included the initial versions of “Surfin’ Safari” and “Surfer Girl." Like so many small labels, Candix found its cash-flow problems exacerbated by an unexpected hit. Murry found a way to void the contract with Candix and signed a new deal with Capitol.

Before the new deal was reached, however, Al Jardine had dropped out of the one-hit band to attend pharmacy school in Michigan. He was replaced by Carl’s 13-year-old friend David Marks; they both had taken their first guitar lessons from John Maus, who later moved to England and became a member of the Walker Brothers.

“Surfin’ Safari," released June 4 by Capitol, became a #14 national hit. But the Beach Boys sound didn’t coalesce until the January 5, 1963, session that produced “Surfin’ USA." The song was a rewrite of Chuck Berry's “Sweet Little Sixteen” with new surf lyrics and radically restructured harmonies. More importantly, it was the first time Brian took charge in the studio and insisted on the sound he wanted.

It was on that song, he explained in the liner notes for the CD reissue, that “we developed a stylish sound, the high sound [that] became our sound. It was the first time we had ever sung our voices twice on one record. It strengthens the sound. Sing it once, then sing it again over that, so both sounds are perfectly synchronized. This makes it much brighter and gives it a rather shrill and magical sound without using echo chambers. It makes it sound spectacular, so much power."

“When we heard ‘Surfin’ USA,’” Carl said earlier, “we just knew it was going to be an undeniably big hit that could be played with anything. It was the first time we were aware we could make a powerful record. Instead of a little hokey California style of music, Brian had adopted a more universal style, and he got into the mainstream of rock for the first time. We were total Church Berry freaks, and the original Church Berry record is a fabulous record, but we made it our own. Brian just transformed it into a Beach Boys record. You don’t go, “Oh, that’s the tune,’ which is unusual.”

Released in March, “Surfin’ USA” became a #3 national hit, and the album of the same name rose to #2. Suddenly, Carl, who was still in high school, and Dennis, who was still learning the drums, found themselves playing to packed houses in Iowa and Pennsylvania. The Beach Boys didn’t pay their dues before they achieved stardom; they paid later.

Through Brian produced “Surfin’ USA,” Nick Venet got the credit. This forced a showdown. “Brian was really the one making the records” Carl insisted. “Nick would call out the take number, but he wasn’t part of making the music. When Brian said he wouldn’t work with Nick anymore, Capitol sent over this other guy. Then it became real clear to Brian, and he said, ‘Look, I’m not cutting with these guys, and what’s more, I’m not going to use your studio. We’ll just send you the next record.’

“Now this was a big thing is those day, because record companies were used to having absolute control over their artists. It was especially nervy, because Brian was a 21-year-old kid with just two

albums. It was unheard of. But what could they say? Brian made good records. He wouldn't work at Capitol because it was a crappy-sounding studio. It has a fabulous string sound, and it was great for those records that Nat King Cole made, but not for rock'n'roll guitar. So we recorded at Western Recorders, which was really our home."

Brian's role model was Phil Spector. In late 1962, Spector had produced the Crystals' "He's a Rebel" with Darlene Love on lead vocals and a band that included keyboardist Leon Russell, guitarist Glen Campbell, drummer Hal Blaine and saxophonist Steve Douglas. Spector took the New York R&B sound that producers Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller had crafted with the Drifters and Coasters and expanded it into utopian, Californian proportions, doubling instruments, layering track upon track, until he created his fabled "Wall of Sound" that mimicked the overwhelming feelings of a teenager in love.

"Brian just adored Phil," Carl explained. "Brian started going to Phil's sessions, and it just blew him away. Phil would play things back so loud it was scary. I think the psychological and emotional impact of going in and hearing songs before they came out made him totally fascinated with Phil, under a spell almost. That was Brian's favorite kind of rock; he liked it better than the early Beatles stuff. He loved the Beatles' later music when they evolved and started making intelligent, masterful music, but before that Phil was it."

On September 26, Spector invited a startled Brian to play piano on the Crystals' recording of "Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town." Before long, Brian was hiring Spector's musicians to play on Beach Boys sessions. More importantly, Brian was applying Spector's layered "Wall of Sound" to very different kinds of songs.

"Brian just took Phil's production techniques," Carl added, "and applied them to a more refined, more evolved music. For all their production, Phil's stuff was mostly real simple tunes; Brian's were far more complex. Brian did a lot with dynamics; his music would be big and loud, and then get soft and change color and tempo. Phil was mostly loud."

On Valentine's Day, 1963, the Beach Boys were hired as the backing band for Jan & Dean, who were still the bigger stars. After the Beach Boys had backed the vocal duo on its biggest hits that night, Jan Berry and Dean Torrence volunteered to sing the Beach Boys' only two hits, "Surfin'" and "Surfin' Safari." It went so well that Jan Berry invited the group to repeat the performance in a recording studio for the upcoming album, *Jan & Dean Take Linda Surfing*. At the end of those sessions, Brian played Berry the newly recorded but unreleased "Surfin' USA."

Berry immediately recognized the leap forward that the song represented—not just for the Beach Boys but for the whole L.A. rock scene. He tried to convince Brian to let Jan & Dean record it as a single, but Brian wouldn't budge. Instead he offered the duo another song he was working on, "Surf City." Not only did Brian write the song but he also sang the duet lead with Berry and helped produce the disc. Neither Capitol Records, the Beach Boys' label, nor Murry Wilson, the band's manager and publisher, was amused when Jan & Dean's "Surf City" went to #1.

Brian didn’t care. He needed colleagues to collaborate with, peers to test himself against and protégés to produce. He found them in Phil Spector, Jan Berry, Gary Usher, Terry Melcher, Bruce Johnston, Roger Christian, P.F. Sloan, Steve Barri, Glen Campbell and Marilyn Rovell.

Usher was a fledgling songwriter whose Uncle Benny lived across the street from the Wilsons, and while visiting one day Usher introduced himself to Brian. They co-wrote “Lonely Sea” that same day and would go on to co-write songs such as “409” and “In My Room." Usher would later produce the Four Speeds (which featured Dennis Wilson on drums) and the Hondells, who had a #9 hit with their version of Brian’s “Little Honda."

“Little Honda” and “409” were both examples of the way surf music branched off into hot-rod music in 1963. Customizing cars and then racing them down empty highways late at night or across the desert salt flats was an even bigger part of Southern California youth culture than surfing. Hot-rodding wasn’t as exotic as surfing, but record buyers in Des Moines or Phoenix could live out the lyrics of a hot-rod song the way they never could a surf song.

Translating the surf-music format into hot-rod tunes wasn’t difficult. The music was only subtly different. If surf music was a lot of Dick Dale and some Chuck Berry, hot-rod music was a little more Berry and a little less Dale—i.e. less percussive staccato and more chiming riffs. Instead of slang about waxes and boards; you used slang about carburetors and pistons; instead of name-dropping the top surfing beaches, you cited the nicknames for the top drag-racing strips; instead of warning about the dangers of a “Wipe Out," you warned of “Deadman's Curve."

No one knew the hot-rod lingo better than Roger Christian, a popular disc jockey on KFWB-AM in Los Angeles. When he expounded at length on the Beach Boys’ new single, “409," on the air one night, Murry arranged for a writing session between Christian and Brian. Christian showed Brian a notebook poem about a drag race between a 413 super-stock Dodge and a fuel-injected Corvette Stingray. “Pedals to the floor, hear the dual quads drink," Christian wrote, “and now the four-thirteen’s lead is starting to shrink." Brian quickly added music and they called the song “Shut Down," which rose to #23 as the B-side of “Surfin’ USA."

Christian’s melodious command of tongue-twisting car jargon made him the poet laureate of hot-rod music. He not only co-wrote "Don’t Worry Baby," "Little Deuce Coupe" and "Spirit of America" with Brian Wilson, but he also co-wrote "Dead Man's Curve," "The Little Old Lady from Pasadena," “Drag City” and "Sidewalk Surfin’" with Jan Berry. The last song was a semi-successful attempt (a #25 single) to merge the surf and hot-rod genres to describe the new fad of skateboarding. Alas, the metal wheels on the early skateboards were hard to control, and it wasn’t until polyurethane wheels were introduced in 1972 that the sport took off.

Terry Melcher was the son of popular actress Doris Day. He was thus heir to Hollywood royalty, but he too got caught up in the surf-music craze. He teamed up with another son of privilege, Bruce Johnston whose father owned the Owl Rexall Drug Company, to form a duo that performed as Bruce

& Terry and produced such acts as the Rip Chords and the Hot Doggers. The duo's "Summer Means Fun" rose to #72 in 1964, while the Rip Chords' "Hey Little Cobra" rose to #9 the same year.

In the wake of the Beach Boys' success, L.A. was suddenly awash in singles by new surf and hot-rod groups. Most of these weren't real groups; they were just a singer or two backed by the same floating pool of session musicians: often including Glen Campbell, Hal Blaine and Bruce Johnston. If a single happened to click, a group would be hastily assembled and sent out on tour. It was an odd blend of amateurism and professionalism. Most of the musicians and producers were full-time pros who worked with Brian Wilson and Phil Spector, but the songs were usually quickly written and just as quickly recorded. As a result, the resulting records were usually well played but almost never over-thought. Often generic and occasionally inspired, they all had that spur-of-the-moment quality of adolescence.]

One such group was the Fantastic Baggys, which was really nothing more than P.F. Sloan & Steve Barri, who had been writing songs and singing harmonies for Jan & Dean. The Baggys had a minor hit with "Summer Means Fun," but Sloan and Barri soon went on to write "Eve of Destruction" for Barry McGuire and "Secret Agent Man" for Johnny Rivers.

It was a very male-dominated scene, and only a few women had much impact. Carol Kaye, the bassist on many Phil Spector sessions, also played on most of the Beach Boys' 1964-68 sessions. Carol Conners, who had called herself Annette Kleinbard as the lead singer in Spector's Teddy Bears trio, co-wrote songs for Dick Dale and the Rip Chords, including the latter's "Hey Little Cobra." And the Honeys were surf music's most recorded female group.

The Rovell Sisters (Marilyn, Diane and Barbara) had become the Honeys (the surfing slang term for good-looking women) when Barbara dropped out and was replaced by the sisters' cousin Sandra Glantz, who renamed herself Ginger Blake. Ginger was dating Gary Usher when he took her to see the Beach Boys at L.A.'s Pandora's Box on October 28, 1962. A smitten Brian asked for a taste of the 14-year-old Marilyn's hot chocolate and promptly spilled it all over her (cf. the song "All Summer Long"). Nonetheless they not only started dating, but Brian also started writing songs and producing them for the Honeys.

The Honeys were nowhere near as precise in their harmonies as the Beach Boys were, however, and none of their records became hits. Later Marilyn and Diane recorded some of Brian's most interesting music as American Spring and then as Spring, but those outings also flopped. In fact, Brian's dream of becoming a Spector-like producer who created hits for multiple acts fizzled. The Beach Boy's production of the Survivors ("Pamela Jean"), Gary Usher ("Sacramento"), Sharon Marie ("Thinkin' 'Bout You, Baby") and Glen Campbell ("Guess, I'm Dumb") may have been exquisite but the commercial payoff was nil. Only his uncredited production for Jan & Dean had led to hits. paid off. For better or worse, the Beach Boys were going to be Brian's primary vehicle.

On June 12, 1963, Brian oversaw his first recording session as the Beach Boys' official producer and decided to re-record one of his earliest compositions, "Surfer Girl." He added a new, enthralling intro

that pitted a climbing electric-bass figure against his own wordless falsetto. Written at a hot-dog stand for his then-girl friend Judy Bowles and loosely based on Jiminy Cricket's “When You Wish Upon a Star," the up-and-down, wave-like melody captures all the yearning of first love, especially with the double-tracked vocal harmonies by the newly confident group.

Brian’s own lyrics wonder if this beauty by the shore really loves him, and with the chords changing every half measure you can sense the ground shifting beneath his feet. When the song transitions into the bridge, the harmonies suddenly fall out of their established pattern, ushering us into a utopian fantasy where the shy, love-struck boy imagines, “We could ride the surf together, while our love would grow." It’s a dizzying vision of what might be, and the vertigo comes from the combination of very sophisticated chord changes and a simple, emotionally direct lyric and lead vocal.

“‘Surfer Girl’ has a real spiritual quality to it,” Carl claimed. “It’s an R&B tune in structure with that slow rock beat, but there’s a real heart attached to that; the chords are just so filling. It was really beautiful to be alive when that record was playing. That’s what blows me away about music. You put this needle on this little plastic thing, and the whole atmosphere can be transformed. The way our voices sounded on that, the melody Brian wrote, the way he put the arrangement together, that might be the perfect coming together of all elements. It’s very enchanting; it’s very Brian.”

“Surfer Girl” rose to #7 on the singles charts, and its flipside, “Little Deuce Coupe," topped out at #15. Earlier in 1963, “Surfin’ USA," had risen to #3, while its flip, “Shut Down," had gone to #23. At the end of the year, “Be True to Your School," featuring the Honeys as backing-vocal cheerleaders, went to #6, while its B-side, “In My Room," hit #23. Capitol Records released three Beach Boys albums in 1963: *Surfin’ USA* (#2) in March, *Surfer Girl* (#7) in September and *Little Deuce Coupe* (#4) in October. That same year Jan & Dean released four hit singles: “Linda” (#28), “Surf City” (#1), “Honolulu Lulu” (#11) and “Drag City” (#10). The Sufaris had a #2 hit with “Wipe Out," and the Chantays had a #4 hit with “Pipeline."

Surf music, inspired by a sport that a tiny percentage of Americans actually pursued, now rivaled the girl groups and Motown as the hottest new things in American popular music. And as it had for years, Americans utterly dominated pop music in the English-speaking world.

Then, on December 26, 1963, Capitol released a single called “I Want To Hold Your Hand," by a virtually unknown British group called the Beatles. The British Invasion was on, and by April the Beatles occupied the top five slots on the singles charts. The Beatles, the Dave Clark Five, the Animals, Peter & Gordon, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, Herman's Hermits, the Yardbirds and their fellow Brits dominated the charts so much in 1964 and ’65 that the instrumental surf groups virtually disappeared .

Brian was spurred on by the competition, however. As he told Earl Leaf of Teen Beat Magazine, “We needed to grow. Up to this point we had milked every idea dry. We milked it fucking dry. We had done every possible angle about surfing and then we did the car routine. But we needed to grow artistically."

Yet it would be two car songs that would lift the Beach Boys into a new artistic realm. “I Get Around” was a seemingly simple ode to the liberation American teenagers felt when they got their own automobile and could go wherever they wanted without their parents. The repeating chant of “Get around, round, round, I get around," was set to a propulsive Chuck Berry-like riff.

But what made the song special were the endless variations Brian put on this simple theme. The chant itself was sung in succession with four different melodies against four different chords, even as Brian sang a counterpoint falsetto melody. Mike’s gruff bravado on the verses was set off by trebly surf guitar and interrupted periodically by a low-register guitar figure. So many things were going on in two minutes and 12 seconds that it was a song of constant surprise even as its vehicular momentum never let up.

More revealing was “Don’t Worry, Baby.” Like the earlier “In My Room," this was a confessional ballad of insecurity at odds with the Beach Boys’ usual sunny optimism. In many an interview, Brian has cited the Ronettes’ Phil Spector-produced “Be My Baby” as his favorite record of all time, and the similar drum intro indicates that “Don’t Worry, Baby” was his attempt to match his hero—not only in the wall-of-sound arrangement but also in the teen-opera narrative of the lyrics. Over the nervously climbing verse melody, Brian admits, “I don’t know why, but I keep thinking something's bound to go wrong." By bragging too much about his car, he’s gotten himself into a drag race he doesn’t think he can win.

But it’s clear from the immensity of the harmonies, that his anxiety concerns more than just one race—it’s about his new girl friend, his parents, his future. It’s hard enough for a teenager to find a place in a world that's stable, but in the early ‘60s, the world had been thrown in flux by the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Civil Rights Movement and the contraceptive pill. The singer's] nervousness intensifies in the stop-and-go channel verse and then all the tension releases in the glorious chorus, when his girl friend reassures him, “Don’t worry, baby, everything will work out all right." Brian’s giddy high tenor is supported by the three-part harmony vocals singing a second melody and a bass vocal singing a third melody. It’s one thing to be told that everything will work out, but this music makes you believe it.

But everything didn’t work out all right. Brian wasn’t competing with just Phil Spector and the Beatles; he was also competing with his own father, the frustrated songwriter and stern disciplinarian who tried to micro-manage every concert appearance and every recording session. At one point Brian installed a fake board in the studio so Murry would think he was mixing the songs without actually tampering with the music. But during the April 2, 1964, sessions for “I Get Around," Brian had finally had enough of Murry's carping and fired his dad as the band's manager. It was no doubt necessary, but it left psychological scars on everyone concerned.

The double-sided single of “I Get Around” and “Don’t Worry, Baby” rose to #1 and #24 respectively. Another car song, “Fun, Fun, Fun” (#5), had been a hit earlier in the year, and “When I Grow Up (To

Be a Man)" (#9) and "Dance, Dance, Dance" (#8) would be hits later. But the pressure on Brian to write the songs, arrange them, produce them and then sing them on tour was becoming too much.

On December 23, 1964, just 16 days after impulsively marrying his 16-year-old girl friend Marilyn Rovell, the 22-year-old Brian suffered a nervous breakdown on a flight from Los Angeles to Houston for a Beach Boys gig. He began sobbing into a pillow and then spilled out into the aisle. He flew back to Los Angeles the next day and announced he would no longer perform live on stage with the band.

"We were all broken-hearted," Carl remembered. "Michael started crying. We didn't know what it meant; we didn't know what he was going through. He was our leader on stage as well as offstage: He led rehearsals; he made sure tunes got counted off and we were just doing our parts. We had the choice of continuing or not continuing. We just felt, 'This is too much fun to stop.' I just assumed leadership; it seemed natural. I had always been the baby until then. But in terms of taking care of stuff and holding things together, I've in many ways been the older brother ever since."

Session musician Glen Campbell was hired as Brian's emergency replacement and played with the Beach Boys through April, 1965, when he was replaced by Bruce Johnston. Al Jardine had returned to the group in 1963, and David Marks had left a short time later. So now the Beach Boys were a touring quintet (Carl, Dennis, Mike, Al and Bruce) and a recording sextet with Brian. Due to his old contract with Columbia Records, a photo of Bruce would not appear on a Beach Boys album until 1968's *Friends*.

Freed from Capitol's producers, freed from his father's interference, freed from his touring obligations, Brian could now make records the way he wanted when he wanted. Working with the top session players in L.A., many of them Spector veterans, Brian could construct instrumental tracks while his bandmates were out on the road. He began to work on a conceptual album that would be divided between uptempo songs on side one and ballads on side two. There would not be a single surf or car lyric on either half.

The first side of *The Beach Boys Today* contained the hit singles: "When I Grow Up (To Be a Man)," "Dance, Dance, Dance" and "Do You Wanna Dance?" But it was side two, with its five ballads in a row, that marked a new leap forward. Here was an elaboration of "Don't Worry, Baby"—the reluctantly confessed fears and the overcoming of them in a young woman's arms—taken to new heights of musical sumptuousness. In Brian's pursuit of perfection, the number of session musicians had swelled to 11 or more; the number of takes for each song had soared into the 30s.

"Brian took the modern jazz chords of the Four Freshmen and voiced them very much like the R&B records of the '50s," Carl pointed out. "Our vocals were voiced like horn parts, the way those R&B records make background vocals sound like a sax section. It sounded big, because the four parts were all within the same octave; that was really the secret. He used a lot of counterpoint, a lot of layered sound; it had a real depth to it. We didn't just duplicate parts; we didn't just sing at octaves; that would sound really lame, very square."

It’s not as if Brian had abandoned his utopian vision of California and American adolescence, but he could no longer ignore the challenges to that dream. Yes, he was enjoying tremendous commercial success but at the cost of a rupture with his father and a nervous breakdown. Yes, he was living the American Dream but America itself seemed to be suffering a nervous breakdown in Selma and Saigon.] Nothing better summarized this tension between surf-music’s essential optimism and Brian’s growing doubts than the first verse of “In the Back of My Mind”: “I’m blessed with everything/ A world in which a man can cling/ So happy at times that I break out in tears/ But in back of my mind I still have my fears."

The music for “Please Let Me Wonder,” also on the ballad side, is full of swooning open vowels, as if rejoicing in the fulfillment of his romantic vision. But the key couplet is phrased, “Please let me wonder/ If I've been the one you love," an admission that it’s better to keep the possibility of hope alive than to know for certain all hope has been dashed. “Kiss Me Baby” is a similar secular prayer, a sighing wish that the notion of heaven as “Girls on the Beach” might be confirmed by a kiss from the right woman. It was a struggle now to sustain the original vision in the face of adulthood’s trials, but out of that struggle came the greatest surf music of all.

Brian wasn’t the only one wrestling with such troubles. On April 12, 1966, as the Vietnam War was heating up, Jan Berry was driving to the local draft board when his silver Corvette Stingray hit a parked truck at 90 mph, only a few blocks from the "Dead Man's Curve" he had immortalized in song. He suffered severe head injuries and it would be years before he could properly walk and talk again. On January 3, 1967, Carl Wilson was indicted for evading the draft. That same year Dick Dale was diagnosed with rectal cancer and told he had three months to live. His surgery was successful, but he quit the music business and moved to Hawaii to recover.

In April, 1968, Dennis Wilson met Charlie Manson and his followers, who all moved into Dennis’ home and took it over to the point that Dennis had to move out. Manson began pestering Terry Melcher for a record deal and when Melcher turned him down, Manson was so angry that he sent four of his followers to Melcher's home on August 9, 1969, and murdered the house’s new tenants, including actress Sharon Tate. This is not the popular view of surf music, but this is the reality the musicians were coping with.

Rock'n'roll was founded by Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and the rest as the sound of adolescent desire—the insistence that you can have it all, right now. But just as individual adolescents find that desire colliding with reality as they move through their 20s, so did rock'n'roll itself as it moved into the ‘60s. That collision was as inevitable as the coming-of-age process, but it was magnified by the contrast between the stability of the ‘50s and the flux of the ‘60s, between a country led by the grandfatherly Dwight Eisenhower and one led by the murdered John F. Kennedy.

Mediocre rock'n'roll acts avoided this conflict either by ignoring uncomfortable reality or by sneering at the validity of the original dream. The greatest rock'n'roll acts—and the Beach Boys were the one surf act to do this—insisted on both the legitimacy of the initial desire and the reality of the troubling

obstacles. Brian didn't write about the Vietnam War, but he did capture the era's gestalt when he described how easily his hopes for romance or status or a happy family could be shattered. He refused to abandon those hopes, however, and each time asked a woman named Wendy or Rhonda or something else to pick up the pieces and reconstitute the dream.]

The Beach Boys' next album, *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)*, lacked the consistency and cohesion of its predecessor, but it did boast two of the band's most magnificent singles. "Help Me, Rhonda," another prayer for a woman's help in escaping doubt and turmoil, was a reworked version of the album track on *The Beach Boys Today*. Brian removed the harmonica, the tambourine and a gimmicky volume effect on the coda and added new vocal harmonies and lead guitar to make the song more direct and exciting—and take it to #1. It's a great example of how the arrangement can mean as much as the composition.

The other single was "California Girls," a dizzying ode to alluring young women the world over. But what separated it from the band's earlier hits was the 22-second intro, a ballad-tempo, instrumental section that evoked all the anxiety of the time before the mood was suddenly dispelled by a triumphant surf anthem erupting out of nowhere. That transition, one of the most dramatic musical moments of the '60s, is the epitome of adult self-doubt being conquered by rock'n'roll belief.

Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!) was released July 5, 1965. On July 12, Brian began recording the tracks for what would become the album *Pet Sounds*. He took his time with this album, because he wanted every track to be as good as his best singles. Capitol still expected three albums a year, so Brian tossed them the bone of the hastily recorded album of older songs by the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Phil Spector, the Everly Brothers, the Beach Boys and others. Merry-making noises were later dubbed onto the studio session to justify the casual, unplugged arrangements and the title, *Party*!

On December 3, the Beatles released *Rubber Soul*, and Brian realized the bar had just been raised. "*Rubber Soul* blew my mind," he remembered. "I liked the way it all went together, the way it was all one thing. It was a challenge to me to do something similar. That made me want to make *Pet Sounds*. The competition inspired me so much to make music. It didn't make me want to copy them but to be as good as them. I didn't want to do the same kind of music but on the same level."

To help him write a suite of songs about the transition from adolescence to adulthood, Brian hired his wife's friend Tony Asher, an advertising writer who had written jingles for Barbie dolls. It seemed an unlikely match, but Asher knew how to selflessly turn his clients' wishes into pithy phrases and he proved as adept at translating Brian's coming-of-age struggles as he had at translating the allure of a plastic doll. Whether the lyrics described youthful alienation ("I Just Wasn't Made for These Time"), sexual expectancy ("Wouldn't It Be Nice"), false bravado ("That's Not Me") or the loss of innocence ("Caroline No"), Asher found the conversational phrases that well served some of the richest pop music of the decade.

"The disappointment and the loss of innocence that everyone had to go through when they grow up and find everything's not Hollywood are the recurrent themes on that album," Carl clarified. "Singles

weren’t enough for Brian anymore; he wasn’t getting enough out of the experience. Most of the albums at that time had one hit and 11 other tunes, but he was one of the first to make albums as a whole. When I heard it, I just thought it was the best work he had ever done. The music was very grown-up, very evolved, very artistic, which really thrilled me, because you can only do ‘I Get Around or ‘Fun, Fun, Fun’ so many times.”

Symptomatic of the album's departure from the norm was "God Only Knows," the flip side of the top-10 single, "Wouldn't It Be Nice," and a top-40 tune itself. A French horn played a slow, lyrical line against a bleating accordion, and they were soon joined by the song's unusual rhythm section: a plucked upright bass, shaken sleigh bells and the wooden cups used to make the clip-clop sound of a horse.

Carl sang the opening verse in a soaring tenor, aching with a strange mixture of romantic loyalty and fear of loss that set up the chorus: "God only knows what I'd be without you." After the second chorus, the rhythm shifted to a nervous pattern that had bass, cello and harpsichord jumping in unison. After a third verse, it all came together for a dizzying finale that combined the elegant French horn, jingling sleigh bells, jumpy rhythm, three-part counterpointed harmony and the intense feelings of joy and fear that only a new love can produce.

The song is also a good example of why Brian titled the album *Pet Sounds*. He believed the sound of each instrument or each combination of instruments has a distinctive personality. Some of those sounds (sleigh bells, say, or a French horn) were his favorites, and he wanted to make an album that collected all his "pet sounds." (Of course, the title also had a jokey, secondary meaning: Brian’s two dogs, Banana and Louie, can be heard barking at the end of the original album).

"We used different percussion because we didn’t want it to sound too boomy," Brian revealed. “We wanted it to sound more delicate. I didn’t want it to sound too rock'n'roll. I thought it would be original to use a cello in rock'n'roll. It gave me other colors to work with…And it’s important to use humor so people don’t get bored, so they won’t be bothered by it.”

"Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)" was a guitar-less ballad that featured Brian singing in a devotional high tenor about the romantic moment when words fail. A string quartet played the minor seventh chords at close intervals, while the tympani boomed and a fat-toned electric bass drifted from the expected root note to create harmonic tensions within the lush sound. When Brian sang in an intimate hush, "Don't talk; take my hand and listen to my heartbeat. Listen! Listen! Listen!" the music demanded that you listen just as closely to its throbbing pulse.

Most pop music unifies its lyric, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic devices so it can communicate one simple emotion as powerfully as possible. You can hear this in songs as diverse as “Blue Skies," “Please, Please, Please” and “You Really Got Me." This unified approach can be quite satisfying, but it can't reflect the complications of adult emotions in real life. The challenge for the pop songwriter is to mirror real life's conflicts in the song and still deliver the satisfying resolution pop music requires.

Bob Dylan did it by introducing irony into rock'n'roll lyrics, and Brian's introduction of non-standard harmonies and timbres proved just as revolutionary.

When critics and musicians talk about *Pet Sounds*, they usually refer to the sophisticated compositions and innovative production. When Brian himself talked about *Pet Sounds*, though, he talked about the album's tremendous feeling. "I experimented with sounds that would make the listener feel loved," he wrote in the reissue's liner notes. "I needed to get this one album out to my fans and the public from my heart and soul. I was in a loving mood for a few months and it found its way to recorded tape."

Many rock'n'roll albums since *Pet Sounds* have pioneered sophisticated musical approaches, but no other album has so successfully married technique with feeling. When Brian sings "You Still Believe in Me," you can hear his anxiety rise with the unorthodox chord progression as he confesses "I can't help how I act when you're not here with me." And you can hear his astonished relief that his girl friend still believes in him when the melody comes cascading down again and again on the glorious coda.

Brian was only 23 when he created *Pet Sounds*. He recorded some fine songs afterward, but he never again enjoyed a period when his optimism, talent and work habits coalesced like this. It was a transitory moment of innocence that Brian was already looking back on during the album's final and best song, "Caroline No."

The song's percussion had a distant, echoing quality, and Brian played the longing, heartbreaking chords on a harpsichord as he sang to an old girl friend: "Could I ever find in you again things that made me love you so much then? Could we ever bring them back once they have gone? Oh, Caroline, no." The song ends with the sound of a dog barking as it chases a train roaring by. Brian had as much chance of hanging on to his innocence as that dog had of catching that train.

One of Brian's most autobiographical songs on *Pet Sounds* is "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times," which anticipated the resistance he got from Capitol Records on the *Pet Sounds* project. The company (and some band members) weren't too happy with Brian's departure from the tried-and-true Beach Boys formulas. "Every time I get the inspiration to go change things around," Brian sang, "no one wants to help to look for places where new things might be found."

More impressed were the Beatles. When they first heard *Pet Sounds*, John Lennon and Paul McCartney went off and immediately wrote the song "Here, There and Everywhere" as a response. As McCartney later commented in the liner notes for the *Pet Sounds* reissue, "*Pet Sounds* was my inspiration for making *Sgt. Pepper*… the big influence. *Pet Sounds* flipped me. Still one of my favorite albums of all-time just 'cause of the musical invention…wow… I play it for our kids now, and they love it. That was the big thing for me [in 1966]. I just thought, 'Oh, dear me. This is the album of all-time. What are we gonna do?'"

“Here, There and Everywhere” was part of the Beatles’ *Revolver* album, which was released August 8, 1966. Once again Brian felt challenged and once again he responded. He was already working on a new single called “Good Vibrations,” and in his effort to top the latest Beatles album Brian spent 94 hours over the course of 22 recording sessions in four different studios on the three-minute-35-second song.

The song was recorded in modular sections that Brian stitched together into a seamless whole. When it was released on October 9, 1966, the Beach Boys’ publicist Derek Taylor labeled the single a “pocket symphony,” not only for its non-rock instruments—cello, theremin, tack piano, harpsichord and tympani—but also for its multiple sections that burst the format of the verse-chorus-bridge pop song.

For all its musical sophistication, however, the lyrics, mostly by Mike, celebrate the common phenomenon of flirtatious young people sending unspoken “good vibrations” to one another. This is what pop music does best: taking a universal experience that the average person can’t describe in words and giving it aural shape. In the last half-minute of the song—when the cello is sawing away, the theremin is pulsing like a spaceship, the tambourine is rattling and the voices are bouncing at the crazy angles of a pinball machine—it does sound like an unexpected infatuation—or a meaning-of-life epiphany.

By the time “Good Vibrations” was released as a single, soon to go to #1, Brian was already at work on a whole album, to be called *Smile*, that would use the same approach. He recruited a collaborator—Van Dyke Parks, a bohemian musician who had been playing sessions for producer Terry Melcher—to write lyrics as far-out as the music.

"The first thing we did was we knocked off ‘Heroes and Villains’ in one day," Parks recalled. “Brian sang the melody, and it sounded like Marty Robbins to me, so I wrote about the American West. I made it a policy not to change one note of the melody, because each stone in the melody is essential to the architecture. Melody is feeling, and feelings are important; they speak even to the comatose."

"I thought Van Dyke was a genius," Brian said. “We wanted to capture the mood of early Americana, Plymouth Rock and all that. Van Dyke had a lot of knowledge about America. I gave him hardly any direction. We wanted to get back to basics and try something simple. We wanted to capture something as basic as the mood of water and fire."

While the Beach Boys were out on tour, Brian and Parks were working with the usual session musicians to create the modular sections for an Old West fable called “Heroes and Villains," for two fantasias on American history called “Roll Plymouth Rock” and “Cabin Essence," for an ode to a young girl's coming of age called “Wonderful” and for much more. The puzzle pieces were there to be assembled into the final mosaic, but Brian couldn’t put them together.

There were several reasons. For one, it was a period of heavy drug use within L.A.’s musical scene, and Brian was less equipped to handle the chemical pressure than others. His longstanding problems

with his family, which had already triggered one nervous breakdown, now triggered another. It didn't help that Mike Love was an outspoken opponent of the new direction Brian was taking, nor did it help that Capitol Records was less than enthused. Then the Beatles beat Brian to the punch and released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* on June 1, 1967. Something broke inside Brian and he couldn't finish *Smile*—and he could never live down the failure of not finishing his most ambitious project.

"I knew Brian was headed for disaster, psychological collapse," argued Parks. "A lot of that had to do with drug experimentation. Though I had done my fair share, I wasn't interested getting into a tent with Brian to do psychedelics. I didn't want to be involved in anything that would incapacitate him. I was also intimidated by Mike Love; I was physically afraid of him, because Brian had confided to me what Mike had done to him."

"Because I was on drugs," Brian conceded, "I couldn't concentrate, and this music requires a lot of concentration. If we had released it then, I don't think it would have sold one copy; I don't think anyone would have liked it, because it sounded like it was from another planet."

"Brian just couldn't thread it all together," Carl Wilson maintained. "It takes a lot of concentration to stay on top of a project like that, and everybody was so loaded on pot and hash all the time, that it's no wonder it didn't get done. He was getting fragmented; he was starting to have difficulty completing things. And it was also a thing, what if it didn't turn out to be great, what if it had totally flopped? That would have completely destroyed him. We would have lost him forever.

"So in the middle of all this, Brian just said, 'I can't do this. We're going to make a homespun version of it instead. We're just going to take it easy. I'll get in the pool and sing. Or let's go in the gym and do our parts.' That was *Smiley Smile*. A lot of *Smile* songs were on *Smiley Smile* but they didn't sound the same at all. The melodies were similar, but the versions were more laid back. Maybe we'd do the melody, but nothing would be there of the original production. I've always said *Smiley Smile* was the bunt, and 'Smile' was the home run."

Some would have you believe that that's the end of the surf-music story, but that's not true. The stripped-down versions of the *Smile* songs that emerged on September 18, 1967, as the *Smiley Smile* album, were not as grandly ambitious as "Good Vibrations," but they were gorgeously, delightfully child-like. It was as if, searching for lost innocence in the face of adult disillusion, Brian had reached back not to adolescence but past it to cusp-of-puberty childhood. The album's jokes about a woman going bald as well as its delight in things as simple as wind chimes or eating one's vegetables captured childhood's purity.

Van Dyke Parks claimed that Brian has a "cartoon consciousness," and he meant that in the most admiring way. It's no great trick, he said, to make complex art out of complex subjects; all you have to do is hold up a mirror. Anyone can tack pops-orchestra charts onto songs about "Topographic Oceans" or "Brain Salad Surgery"; the trick is to reveal the complexity in things as simple as "Vega-

Tables” or “Wind Chimes." Brian, Parks argued, made music that was as easy to grasp as a cartoon and yet rewarded repeated listening as much as Bach.

"My friend Lowell George once described it as smart/dumb," Parks added, “smart and dumb at the same time. Just as the best comic books can turn cliché into high art, so can the best pop music. Brian does that. He can take common or hackneyed material and raise it from a low place to the highest, and he can do it with an economy of imagery that speaks to the casual observer—bam! It's no coincidence that he was working at the same time that Warhol and Lichtenstein were doing pop art.”

The same approach informed the next two albums. *Wild Honey*, released on December 18, was even further stripped down, but its return to the band's R&B/doo-wop roots yielded 10 wonderful celebrations of everyday life and a terrific Stevie Wonder cover. Wonder, though, never sang odes to clean air and refreshing wind or made boyish jokes about seeing a naked woman or brushing one’s teeth. The *Friends* album, released June 24, 1968, was in the same vein, celebrating the mundane pleasures of waking up, getting a back rub or simply doing nothing.

As a back-to-basics move, these records paralleled similar decisions by Bob Dylan (who followed *Blonde on Blonde* with *The Basement Tapes* and *John Wesley Harding*) and the Rolling Stones (who followed *Their Satanic Majesties Request* with *Beggars Banquet* and *Let It Bleed*.). It was as if these artists suddenly realized that the aim of rock'n'roll was not to become ever more complicated but to register an emotional impact—and sometimes it’s easier to do that by being simple than by being complex.

“*Friends*” couldn’t even crack the top-100 of the U.S. album charts, however, and Brian was so discouraged that he largely withdrew from active music-making. In his absence the other Beach Boys took over, cobbling together albums from their own songwriting, from Brian's occasional efforts, from rearranged oldies and from rescued “Smile” tracks. The four albums assembled this way included 1969’s *20/20*, 1970’s *Sunflower*, 1971’s *Surf’s Up* and 1972's *Carl and the Passions—So Tough*.

“Brian is so spontaneous that if there’s a piano and two or three people around to sing parts,” maintained Mike Love at the time, “he’ll sit down and write a song in five minutes. But if you don’t get it right then, he goes off and drops it. For example, one day I went to a surfer’s beach near San Clemente. It was great; the gulls were out and the sun was shining. I was with an old friend and we were talking about old times. On my way home I went over to Brian’s house and told him about it. I said, ‘We should write a song about it called ‘Do It Again.’ He sat down at the piano and did it in no more than five minutes.”

These albums were uneven, but they were not without their charms. The *Smile* tracks were stunning revelations for anyone who hadn’t heard the bootlegs; “Do It Again” was an inevitable top-20 single; Dennis emerged as the George Harrison of the Beach Boys, an unexpected major singer-songwriter on rockers like “Slip on Through” and ballads like “Forever”; South Africans Ricky Fataar and Blondie Chaplin joined the band and added an R&B flavor to “Carl and the Passions," and on the rare

occasion when he was motivated Brian could still come up with songs as exhilarating as “This Whole World” or “Marcella."

“’Til I Die," one of his greatest songs, would have deserved a place on “Pet Sounds” or “Smile." The lyric takes the ocean-waves imagery of his early songs and inverts its meaning: “I'm a cork on the ocean/ Floating over the raging sea/ How deep is the ocean?/ How deep is the ocean?/ I lost my way/ Hey hey hey." The spooky organ track suggests the bobbing motion of the waves, and Brian’s forlorn vocal sounds lost indeed. It’s perhaps the most nakedly autobiographical song he ever produced; it's the dark side of the surf-music moon.

In 1976, a big publicity campaign was launched with the slogan “Brian's back” to celebrate Brian’s return to producing on the “15 Big Ones” album. The truth, however, was that he had abandoned the project before it was finished, and the album's heavy reliance on oldies and unpolished vocal tracks reflected that. A much better album was 1977's “The Beach Boys Love You," which featured 14 new songs written or co-written by Brian. It had the stripped-down, childlike production of “Smiley Smile," “Wild Honey” and “Friends," and its appreciation of airplanes, planets, roller skates, cars, children and late-night television boasts an irresistible innocence. It would stand up as the best Beach Boys album of new songs released after 1970.

Backstage at Maryland’s Capital Centre during this period, I asked Brian himself why he hadn’t been creating more music. With his shaggy beard and college windbreaker, he looked like a bear just up from hibernation but before his first cup of coffee for the year. “It’s a dry period,” Brian claimed. “I only write when I feel it. I don’t like to manufacture something. I’m just not that inspired.” What’s missing that inspired you before? “Girls. Girls that I like.”

In the midst of all this, as the band was trying to find its footing, in 1974 Capitol released a two-LP collection of ‘60s hits, “Endless Summer," which promptly went to #1 and cemented the band's reputation as a nostalgic oldies act. The band tried to counteract that impression with new albums, but the new discs had too few gems and too much filler to turn the tide. Nor did the solo albums from Dennis, Carl, Bruce and Mike gain more than a few isolated supporters. Then Dennis died from a drunken swimming accident on December 28, 1983. Nearly 15 years later Carl would finally die of cancer.

Even while all the original surf-music acts were crumbling before the drugs, alcohol, divorce, auto accidents, cancer and madness of adulthood, the music’s spirit lived on. Paul McCartney continued to be profoundly influenced by Brian—writing “Back in the USSR," an affectionate parody of “Surfin’ USA," and “Because," an affectionate parody of “Warmth of the Sun,” both for the Beatles. For Wings, McCartney wrote the Brian-like car song “Helen Wheels” and the Brian-like nature hymn “Bluebird."

Three L.A. folk-rock bands—the Byrds, the Turtles and the Mamas and Papas—bore the unmistakable stamp of Brian’s surf harmonies. The Byrds, who worked closely with Bruce Johnston’s duo partner Terry Melcher, applied Beach Boys vocal arrangements] to their adaptations of Bob

Dylan and Pete Seeger songs. Lead singer Roger McGuinn later co-wrote the song “Ding Dang” with Brian Wilson for *The Beach Boys Love You* album.

The surf-instrumental band the Crossfires simply shifted gears by renaming themselves the Turtles and imitating the Byrds. But when they shifted from Bob Dylan songs to songs by Gary Bonner and Alan Gordon, such as the #1 hit “Happy Together,” their Beach Boys influence became obvious. Lead singers Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman later joined Frank Zappa’s Mothers of Invention before venturing out on their own as Flo & Eddie.

The Mamas and Papas, produced by former Jan & Dean manager Lou Adler, relied even more heavily on surf vocal harmonies than the Byrds. The Mamas and Papas created a slowed-down version of the Beach Boys single, “Do You Wanna Dance," and the big hit “California Dreamin’" was such a classic bit of surf music—trapped in a northeastern winter, the sumptuous, yearning vocals declare, “I’d be safe and warm/ If I was in L.A./ California dreamin’/ On such a winter's day”—that the Beach Boys themselves later recorded the song.

Among the many musicians who wrote and recorded explicit tributes to the Beach Boys were Neil Young (“Long May You Run”), Elton John (“Since God Invented Girls”), Dave Edmunds “Beach Boy Blood (In My Veins)”) and the Velvet Underground’s John Cale (“Mr. Wilson”).

The Ramones not only re-recorded such surf classics as “California Sun,” “Do You Wanna Dance,” “Surfin’ Bird” and “Surf City” but also paid explicit tribute to surf music with such original songs as “Rockaway Beach” and “Sheena Is A Punk Rocker.” The staccato punk-rock guitar riff that Johnny Ramone defined was little more than an update of Dick Dale's guitar licks. The Ramones inspired a later generation of punk bands such as Green Day, the Mr. T Experience, the Queers and Pennywise who also borrowed Dale’s reverb riffing and the Beach Boys’ uptempo harmonizing—the Queers and Pennywise actually recorded Beach Boys songs.

But no one did more to keep the surf-music tradition alive than Lindsey Buckingham. When this Southern California guitarist and Brian Wilson fanatic joined Fleetwood Mac as de facto arranger and music director, he not only brought along his then-girl friend Stevie Nicks but also revamped the British blues-rock band as an L.A. surf-music band in the mode of the 1965-67 Beach Boys. Buckingham drove the songs along with stiffened surf guitar and layered the vocals with open-vowel harmonies. The songs too—whether written by Buckingham, Nicks or Christie McVie—boasted the utopian yearning of Brian’s mid-‘60s romances.

Buckingham’s first two albums with the band, 1975’s “Fleetwood Mac” and 1977’s “Rumours," went five-times and 19-times platinum respectively. But like his role model, Buckingham wasn’t satisfied with just commercial success and followed those records with a sprawling, experimental double-disc set, “Tusk," and released the title track, featuring the UCLA marching band playing an African rhythm, as a single.

Buckingham introduced the Beach Boys' "Farmer's Daughter" into Fleetwood Mac's live set and later constructed a "Smile"-like extended composition and titled it "D.W. Suite" after Dennis Wilson for his 1984 solo album, "Go Insane." Buckingham also co-wrote "He Couldn't Get His Poor Old Body To Move" with Brian, who released it as the B-side of a 1988 single.

"The Beach Boys showed the way, and not just to California," Buckingham wrote in Rolling Stone in 2004. "Sure, they may have sold the California Dream to a lot of people, but for me, it was Brian Wilson showing how far you might have to go in order to make your own musical dream come true…. Brian fought hard against the industry attitude that if it works, run it into the ground. Music meant much more to him than that. He was trying to do something so much bigger than that with his teenage symphonies to God. In the process, he really rocked the boat and changed the world." Surf music had blossomed suddenly and brilliantly in the '60s and had seen its lingering influence reverberate into the new century. Almost all its commercial success occurred in its first decade, but decades later avid record collectors such as Elvis Costello and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore were still recording Brian Wilson's compositions and exploring surf music's possibilities in their own songs.] But surf music still had one piece of unfinished business: the incomplete "Smile" album, the project that many said represented the pinnacle of surf-music art. So many promises that it would soon be finished had been broken that most surf-music fans had given up all hope. So it was shocking to learn that Brian would be leading his band through a completed version of "Smile" at London's Royal Festival Hall on February 20, 2004.

It almost didn't happen. As a documentary crew filmed the scene, a fearful Brian sat backstage, rocking back and forth, unsure if he could go through with it. It took a pep talk from his old pal Paul McCartney to convince him. When Brian, now a rotund bear of a man, finally took his place behind the keyboard, flinching at the spotlight and sold-out audience, he seemed to hesitate again. But when the wordless, lush harmonies of "Our Prayer" rose around him, he visibly relaxed into the music he had composed 37 years earlier. The a cappella tune had the moving, counterpoint parts of a Bach cantata, but it also had its roots in the wide-open vowels of '50s doo-wop, and Brian underlined that point by segueing into "Gee," the Crows' 1954 hit.

On and on the piece went until it reached its grand climax with "Good Vibrations." As the music died away, the crowd erupted in a roar, McCartney pumping his fist in the air from his seat. Brian beamed, seemingly as surprised as he was pleased that it actually worked and that people actually liked it.

"I was amazed when I finally heard it," Brian admitted. "It brought back a lot of memories. It sounded the way I anticipated it would when I first wrote it. We wrote a bit of new music because we didn't think it was complete. We wanted to make to make a little bit longer. People call it a rock symphony, but it's more a cantata, a rock cantata."

"We wanted to make it sound like it all went together," Brian explained. "We wanted it to sound like a continuum, because I like it when music flows. Bach's music did that. To do that, though, you have to have the knack for it; you have to know your classical music. My favorite was Bach, because he used simple chords and simple forms, but got such complex results. That's what I was trying to do."

If “Smile” had been released in 1967, it would have been unprecedented. When it was finally released as a newly recorded studio album on September 28, 2004, it still sounded unprecedented. Because no one during the years in between had blended rock'n'roll and art music as successfully. There have been countless rock-opera, art-rock and prog-rock projects, but most have merely dressed up mediocre rock'n'roll in the gowns of grandiosity. But Brian the moving parts and shifting textures of art music not to show off but to reflect adulthood’s mixed emotions.

What were those mixed emotions? The desire to still believe in all those teenage dreams of California’s beaches and first love as an earthly paradise, a possible, graspable utopia contrasted with all the adult evidence that such a utopia would always be beyond our reach. The Beach Boys’ idealistic dream of a carefree, adventurous, gratifying life had dissolved in 1967 as they became adults entangled in the real world. Like Elvis Presley, Brian Wilson had created a myth that raised a generation's hopes, only to find that he couldn’t live up to it himself. But, as with Presley, the vision of that utopia, just beyond our grasp, but still enticing us onward, shimmers in the music still.

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