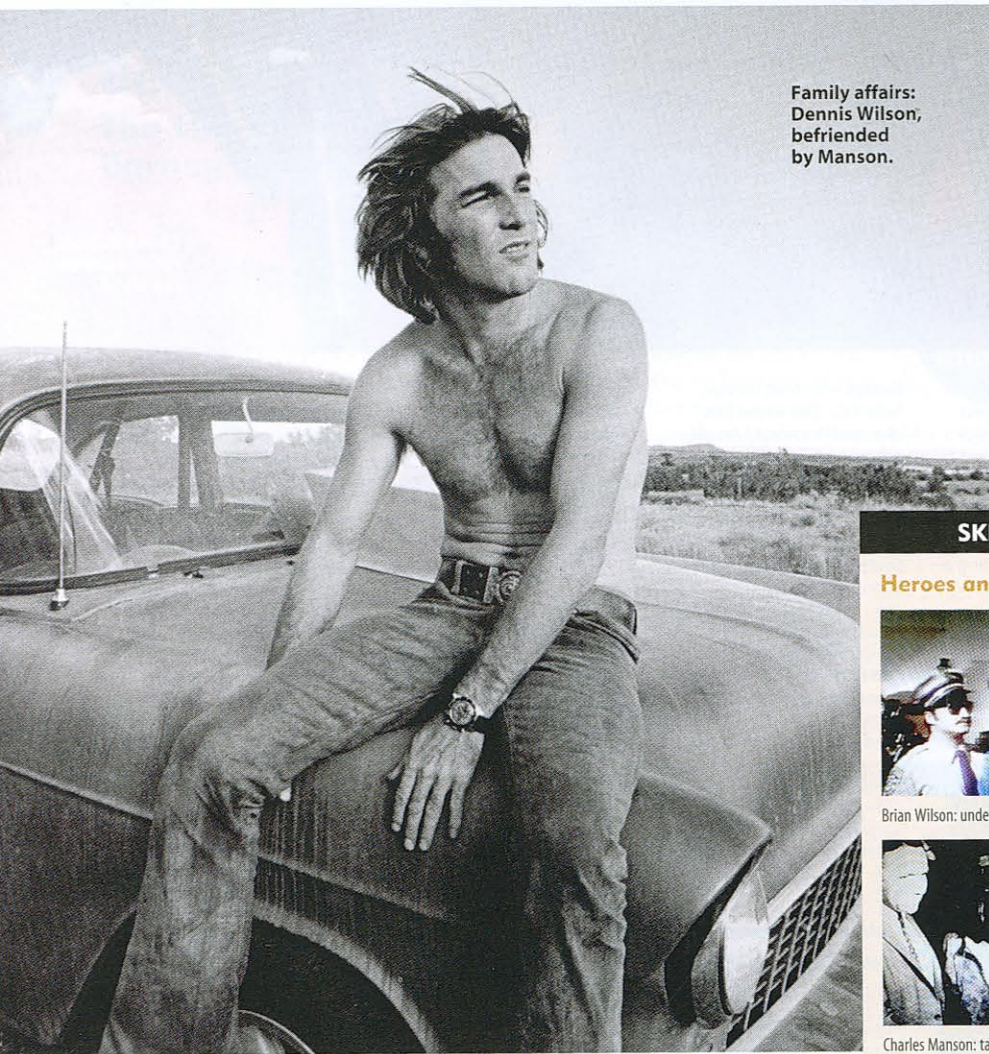


Diabolical liberty

German-made TV documentary starring and linking Charles Manson and The Beach Boys. By Sylvie Simmons.



Family affairs: Dennis Wilson, befriended by Manson.

followers and move them to Topanga Canyon, an outlaw rock neighbourhood in the hills outside LA. In a time of 'Us and Them', Manson wasn't a 'Them'. He made the acquaintance of several celebrities, including Neil Young.

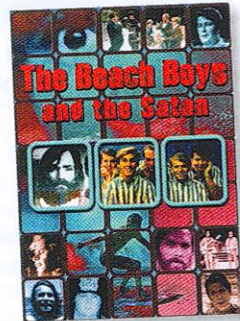
In Dennis Wilson's case, the offers of sex from the girls in Manson's 'Family' helped.

The film doesn't spell this out, preferring more subtle allusions: like the waves The Beach Boys sang about and the bigger, anti-war, youth culture wave that suffused the

country, catching up all manner of flotsam and tossing it about, so that we now find a psychopath selling a song to a hit band; a dark Brian Wilson writing the sunny California Girls on acid and stating, calmly, that without music "I would kill myself"; and Dennis, the only Wilson brother who could surf, drowning by falling off a boat. A psychologist labels Brian the band's "Christ figure"; the same way many still view Manson.

The content is for the most part wonderful. It includes some of the best filmed interviews I've seen with Brian Wilson, and articulate insights from Don Was and David Thomas (Pere Ubu), Brian Wilson fans both. There are satisfyingly large chunks of old Beach Boys 'videos' – not the usual suspects either – and fascinating non-performance footage: skinny Brian demonstrating the Therman; Manson being interviewed in jail saying, "My friends have always been killing people," and "music is my soul".

And, most bizarrely and entertainingly, not to mention adding a touch of the devil, we see Kim Fowley in a yellow suit singing – yes singing – a seemingly just-made-up oral history of mid-'60s LA while Chris Darrow (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) accompanies him on acoustic guitar. Whew.



SKIP TO...

Heroes and villains



Brian Wilson: under suspicion



Charles Manson: take him away



Kim Fowley: Svengali by the pool



Mike Love: meanwhile, back at The Beach Boys

The Beach Boys And The Satan



ABC ENTERTAINMENT

THE AMERICAN Dream-turned-nightmare story has long held a fascination for Europeans, especially when told as a rock parable. This German film traces the transition of Los Angeles pop, over a seven-year period in the '60s, from sunshine to darkness through the stories of one famous band and one infamous monster: five squares and a pentagram.

The story opens with black-and-white film of teenage girls at a Beach Boys concert, screaming, and ends with the implied screams of actress Sharon Tate (Roman Polanski's wife), one of the Los Angelenos slaughtered by Charles Manson's disciples,

and the crime scene photos, red with blood. Manson was – and maybe still is – America's most celebrated home-grown monster; their Myra Hindley in terms of fear, loathing and cult status. The contrast between this bedraggled, evil-eyed murderer and The Beach Boys we see at the start of the film – clean-cut looks, Ken doll clothes and feel-good songs about seaside, cars and girls out of reach, hence unsullied – is blatant.

Yet Manson seemed to have no problem infiltrating the all-American band. In the late '60s, a time of gurus, freaks and a lot of troubled kids looking for leaders, it wouldn't have been hard for an ex-con with an intense personality and an acoustic guitar to find

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