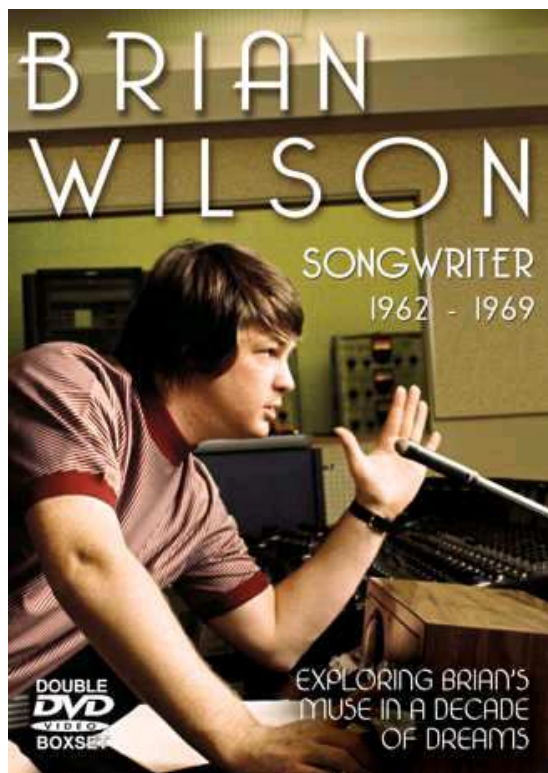


FAME Review: Brian Wilson - Songwriter: 1962 - 1969 (2 DVD set)



Songwriter: 1962 - 1969

Brian Wilson

Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD561 (2 DVD set)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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It's not often enough noted that Brian Wilson sparked one of the most significant turns of direction in rock history. He composed *Pet Sounds* and turned fellow musicians on their heads, the Beatles rushing to issue *Sargeant Pepper's** lest they be aced in the race for chart dominance, everyone else following behind. The Beach Boys may have been provincialists in their initial meteoric rise to fame, but Brian Wilson was the maestro in the gaggle and more than willing to branch out and evolve. However, once he succumbed to a growing mental instability perhaps arising from profligate drug use, neither the group nor he ever again achieved what Brian alone crafted for too brief a period. That space of time was well in collapse by the time *Holland* rolled around (1972), but '69 was an important high-water mark. This DVD charts how, what, and why.

More than once during this exhaustive study (a very generous 3 hours), you'll hear that it was Wilson who introduced jazz chords and changes to rock. At first, this seems a bit striking, but the documentary relates Dick Dale and other surf-music craftsman to an admiration of Elvis and Chuck Berry while Brian was listening to jazz singers and The Four Freshman. Therein is where the dissimilarities are soon understood, the Freshman indelibly imparting their imprint into Beach Boys music from the very beginning. Should you not be familiar with that unjustly undersung group, which had been around since the mid-to-late 40s, the similarities in the clips run here will make you sit up straight and gasp. More than a few musicians and authorities appear to explain the true genesis of the Hawthorne, California, group's sound as you watch it unfold in various directions, including the infamous doo-wop of "Surfin'". Nonetheless, as the narrative progresses, it's obvious that these evolutions would dictate the sensual richness of *Pet Sounds*, the abandoned *Smile*, and other releases. It should also be noted, and *Songwriter* is at pains to do so, that the Beach Boys were the first to define California as hedonistic paradise, the real, true, sparking American Dream.

Earlier on had come the inevitable spectre of Spector, nee Phil. The sonic dramaturge's then-new recording twists appealed enormously to Wilson, a manifestation of what had already been swirling in his mind. Spector's work affirmed Brian's suspicions that such things, these broad canvases of instruments and allsorts, were viable. New doors opened...and opened again a few years later when the Beatles and accompanying British Invasion hit U.S. shores. Everything changed, and the Beach Boys found themselves suddenly on the warm-up bench, their trademark aging instantly. Worse, Murray Wilson, a chivying bastard, Brian's dad, the group's manager, had become a millstone. Ah, but Brian had grown and evolved. He fired pater and looked to new horizons, a good deal of which meant constant competition with the Beatles. Lennon & McCartney, hugely admiring of the guy, adopted the same battle plan. *I Get Around* erupted, a smash, and the Liverpool lads knew a return volley had been fired.

For three hours, this engrossing narrative wends its way. By the time it winds down, you feel as though you've lived this part of the era from a whole new perspective. What I've so far catalogued is only half the feature, and, since I don't like spilling the entire can of beans on DVDs, what follows in Part 2 is equally fascinating. *Songwriter* is not a new thing, this idea of viewable rock journalism, but stands out as an example of how mature the genre has become.

One last matter: let me call your attention to the bonus interview segments, one of which is with Fred Vail, who had been a friend/business associate with the band from the beginning. He recalls going to visit the once monumental WFIL in Philadelphia, to see Jay Cook, who was a huge fan of Brian and a very influential programmer. Vail, as manager, wanted to pitch Cook to carry the new "Add Some Music to Your Day" single as Cook point blank tells him that "The Beach Boys are no longer hip!". At that very second, out of nowhere, Vail re-lives the incident and begins to break down and nearly weep on camera. It's an extraordinary moment, it says so much...and the time frame Vail's talking about was only 1970. The Beach Boys had only been around for 8 years. Vicious, this music world.

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