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Wilson, Brian - Songwriter 1962 - 1969

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Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted November 18, 2010 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Product:

At this point in his life, the legend of former Beach Boy Brian Wilson is already written. There are no new revelations to uncover, no missing masterworks from his already impressive oeuvre. He's outlived his famed mental issues, his many bandmate betrayals (and lawsuits), and his work in progress personality. He's survived to see his magnum opus *Pet Sounds* supplant the rival works of the Beatles as the Best Album Ever (in some circles) and even managed to bring the aborted *Smile* project back from the dead. He is beloved, adored, and universally recognized as a creative genius who, along with the famed Fab Four from the UK, rewrote the pop rock rulebook for generations to come. So it comes as no surprise that the new DVD presentation - **Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962 - 1969** - adds nothing new to his cemented mythos. There are no new disclosures here, no startling insights unearthed via access or approach. Instead, we get an excellent walkthrough for the uninitiated, a primer to prepare those without a working knowledge of the artist of where he came from, and the magical, mysterious places he went.

The Plot:

Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962 - 1969 is more than just a music lesson. It's a look back at how the Beach Boys came about, their narrow if important influences (The Four Freshman), and rise into SoCal surf culture. It's a testimonial to Brian's boyhood enthusiasm,



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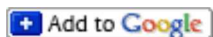
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fights with his father, and eventual decline into self-doubt. It's about the amazing songs he wrote, mini-pop perfections with titles like "Surfer Girl", "I Get Around", "God Only Knows" and "Good Vibrations" - among many, many more. It's also a tad fawning, a documentary that doesn't aim to do much more than accentuate the positive and keep on playing. Wilson is portrayed as a misunderstood visionary (which he most definitely was), an anomaly in a world fueled by fat guitars and fast living. With only Bruce Johnston towing the group line and no input from any other Beach Boy, we are left with anecdotal evidence and plenty of it. The result is a three hour trip into Brian Wilson's creative process - with a few pitfalls and personal/professional battles along the way.

Highly Recommended

E - M A I L

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The DVD:

If you don't know Brian Wilson from *Brian Blessed*, if you can't name a single significant Beach Boys song (except, perhaps, the crap from **Cocktail**, "Kokomo"), then **Songwriter 1962 - 1969** is the film for you. A British production, this flattering overview of the man and his muse is a solid, if slightly superficial, introduction. Die hards who've based their lives on old bootleg copies of the *Smile* sessions can, perhaps, skip the celebration. Aside from a couple of minor elements, there are no real new insights here. We meet Wilson in high school, watch as he discovers jazz chords and complex harmonies ala The Four Freshman, latches onto his brother Dennis' love of surfing, and suddenly finds himself a phenomenon at age 21. Unlike his chief sonic competitors - a certain group of musicians from across the pond in Liverpool - Wilson instantly took control of his muse. He produced the Beach Boys records, incorporating a rapidly growing fascination with Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound" into his expanding artistic frame of reference. When it looked like Beatlemania would upend the SoCal sound, Wilson went introspective and complex. Before long, we see him working with the famed studio musicians The Wrecking Crew, crafting gorgeous masterpieces like "California Girls".

So don't come to **Songwriter** expecting something new. If anything, the best bits are the reminders of how far Wilson's artistry reached. We get to hear forgotten work with The Honeyes (a girl group featuring the composer's future wife), as well as other collaborations/contributions outside the Beach Boys. There's also some great vintage footage of lyricist Van Dyke Parks lambasting Mike Love for demanding an explanation to a few of his famously obtuse lines. But with time and reinterpretation, Brian Wilson's import as part of the progress of modern music is rote. It's been discussion and deconstructed to the point where even a casual fan knows some of the score. They get the inference and jealousy of his buffoonish father, Murray. They recognize the workaholic perfectionism that drove him to complete mental exhaustion. They also know how underappreciated his latter efforts were, band members questioning his desire to "f*ck with the formula".

Still, unlike many knock-off attempts at star collecting, **Songwriter** has a compelling

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center in Wilson, as well as something few films like this have - back catalog access. We get dozens of examples of the Beach Boys hits, including live and studio takes on tracks like "Fun, Fun, Fun", early tune "Surfin'", and *Smile* sequences like "Cabinessence". Even better, when the Beatles arrive in the storyline, their historic performances on Ed Sullivan are shown, as well as snippets of their famed *Pet Sounds*-alike, *Sgt. Peppers*. Sure, it seems odd to discuss the production intricacies of a track like "Good Vibrations" and then show a Wilson-less version of the band performing the song "live". Most of the time, these titles take the easy way out, failing to clear song rights, and instead, substituting lame imitations. Here, we get the real deal and it's refreshing. Still, with its lack of personal perspective from the subject himself and the amount of material yet to discuss, **Songwriter 1962 - 1969** can't help but be a tad underwhelming. We don't expect or want a tabloid dissertation on the man or his many flaws. But unless you know little or nothing about the bedeviled Brian Wilson, you'll hear a lot that's familiar here -for good and for bad.

The Video:

Offered in a polished and professional 1.78:1 anamorphic widescreen image, the transfer for **Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962 - 1969** is terrific. There are no video artifacts and the vintage footage is incorporated well. Colors are nicely controlled and the post-production addition of names, places, dates, and other information items is smooth and unobtrusive. The overall feel is of a high class production, one that took its time to get everything right -from the song selection to the visual representation of same. And since it's spread out over two discs (90 minutes on each), the picture quality remains constant.

The Audio:

The Dolby Digital Stereo 2.0 mix handles the mostly mono Beach Boys material quite well. The other songs do not suffer from such a limited aural spectrum. As usual, the dialogue is easy to discern and the narration is crisp and clean. There are moments when we wish for a greater sonic range (as when Wilson is working with The Wrecking Crew in the studio, or when a famed Spector track is heard), but overall, the auditory landscape here is excellent.

The Extras:

All found on Disc 2, there is little to celebrate. All we get are a few additional interview snippets, links to blogs, and a come-on for a compilation CD. That's it. Not even a Wilson/Beach Boys discography or bio.

Final Thoughts:

While some will question whether or not it's definitive or even detailed, **Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962 - 1969** is still a very good early career overview for a subject that's been done to death. As he continues on, racking up rewards and recognition for his body of work, the composer remains a complicated, confusing enigma. Had he maintained his

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health - both physical and mental - one wonders what he could have accomplished. Of course, without such stumbling blocks, Wilson may have not been the revered genius he is today. Whatever the case, this is a great documentary that's well worth checking out. Easily earning a **Highly Recommended** rating, it stands as part of a growing catalog of critical contemplation of the legend's life and career. Without Brian Wilson, the sun and surf of California might never have made it across the vast expanses of America. But he was much more than a harbinger of fast cars and good times. Luckily, **Songwriter 1962 - 1969** address this...if little else.

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