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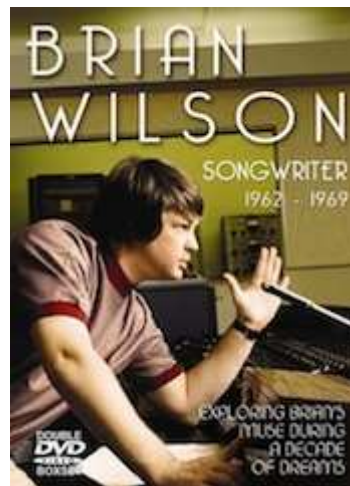
Brian Wilson Songwriter: 1962-1969

starring Brian Wilson Chrome Dreams Group

If you think *Lawrence of Arabia* has too much sand, then you might think this documentary has too much Brian Wilson. Clocking in at a bit north of three hours, this "unauthorized" biography spans Wilson's most productive years. The first of these two discs takes in his childhood and the rise of surf music, with the second disc focusing on his studio years when touring began to overwhelm him.

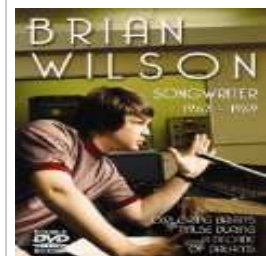
At the end of the series, we leave Wilson sapped by drugs and mental illness with the uncompleted *Smile* project abandoned by Capitol records, which this documentary claims never "got" him.

So how much do we learn about Wilson? He's a driven creative genius with a fatal flaw -- just the type to make a great tragic hero. The Beach Boys was a family project, but Brian often worked with outsiders, including his girlfriend (in The Honeys) and he even gave Jan and Dean a huge hit ("Surf City"). Wilson saw himself as a sort of Phil Spector, and hung out at Gold Star Studios. Beginning in the surf genre, Wilson expanded into the wall of sound, and ultimately became influenced by the psychedelic movement. Extensive interviews with bandmates, session players, producers, and musical experts are endless and



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occasionally fascinating. We see early "videos" created to promote the songs. A professional musician explains chord structure and key changes and the internal dynamics of Wilson's music. Someone describes the process as creating "Wagnerian kids' music." At the time we all saw his sound as light, floaty love songs that celebrated sun, sand, surf, and birth control pills, but what we were experiencing was divine intervention.

Were the Gods of Rock speaking to us as we made out and worked on our sunburns? Possibly, but those Gods are pretty loquacious and not everything they say is critically important. Like a session with your camera-crazy uncle after a vacation to the Dakotas, there's an interesting story lurking here if an editor would exercise the discipline of the 90-minute human attention span. I watched this over several nights and after awhile I found myself checking to see if I accidentally hit the double back arrow. As much as I love Wilson's sound and songs, this documentary induces a powerful urge to fast forward.

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