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Music DVD Review: Brian Wilson - Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962-1969

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I'm sure that at least several million words have been written about the career of The Beach Boys and its guiding spirit Brian Wilson. Now, Music Video Distributors has released a new DVD set that seeks to expand on that knowledge.

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Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962-1969 is an ambitious, two DVD, and 190 minute set that may not introduce a great deal of new material but gathers a lot of the old into one place in a cogent and understandable manner. It wisely concentrated on the early period of his career which allows for a more intimate examination of its various parts. Hopefully a second edition will pick up where this one left off.

If it is one thing, it is extensive. The title is a little misleading as it explores more than just his songwriting talents and production. It also examines his personality, musicianship, The Beach Boys, and the culture against which he wrote.

It is a technically excellent production and the interviews, clips, and performances are expertly woven among the dialogue to produce both an interesting and fast paced documentary. The inside of the gatefold package provides a nice collage of pictures from various points in his and The Beach Boys career.

The documentary begins not only at the beginning of his career but with a short history of surf music itself, which evolved as a primarily instrumental discipline, where twang laden guitars and rhythms transmitted the feeling of surfing. It was Brian Wilson who put those feelings into words and told the story of not only surfing but the idyllic and eternal summer and teen culture.

An interesting stop in his formative years was an examination of The Four Freshmen who were so instrumental in the development of his approach to the harmonies which would dominate The Beach Boys sound.

His career is followed from its first hit "Surfin'" to his early studio work, and onward to the first modern sounding single "Surfin' USA." His relationship with his father Murry is presented. His studio technique and its development as one of the leading and influential producers in music history is explored.

All the major stops in his career are examined and many in depth. The Pet Sounds and aborted Smile projects are present as are some of his lesser stops such as Friends.

A host of Brian Wilson acquaintances and intimates are on hand to provide interviews. One of the most crucial is early Beach Boys member David Marks whose stories about the group's and Wilson's early career are interesting and informative. Also contributing are Bruce Johnston, Hal Blaine, Beach Boys manager Fred Vail, producers Bill Halverson & Russ Titelman, biographers Peter Ames & Dominic Priore, plus such musicians as Bill Hinsche, Danny Hutton, and others.

The set is filled with a number of historical performances and the music is re-assessed as to its value and impact. Archival footage gives the production an authentic feel.

Brian Wilson: Songwriter 1962-1969 is an exhaustive look into the first decade of an American music genius. It should please his long time fans plus introduce him to some new ones as well.

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