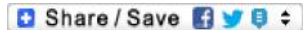
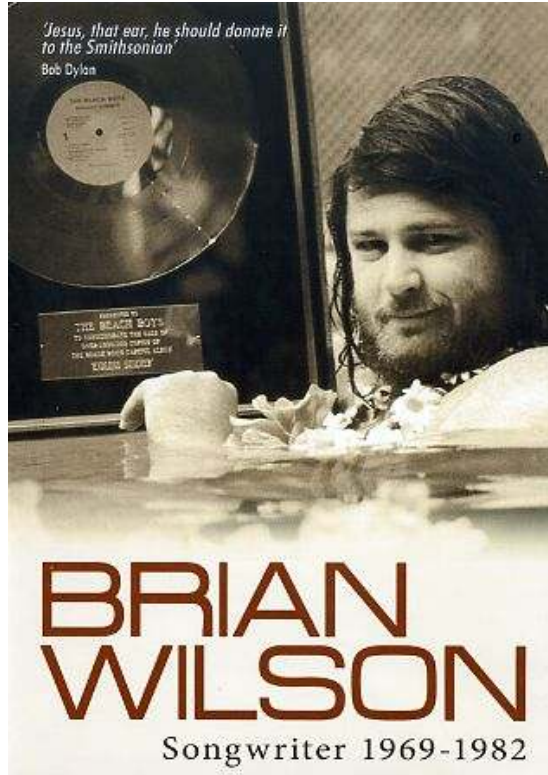


FAME Review: Brian Wilson - Songwriter: 1969 - 1982 (DVD)

Songwriter: 1969 - 1982

[Brian Wilson](#)

Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD574 (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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"Jesus, that ear! He should donate it to the Smithsonian."—[Bob Dylan](#), of Brian Wilson

The latest *Sexy Intellectual* rock doc chronicles the onset and manifestation of the Conflict 'n Madness Era of 13 years in Brian Wilson's strange evolution, a period as compelling as it is dissolute and melancholy. **Songwriter: 1969 - 1982** commences just as the surf 'n [deuce coupe](#) period of the illustrious group drew to an end, and Wilson's underlying true aesthetic struggled to make its way to some semblance of foreground. The film is an unsettling chronicle of greed and counter-revolution on the part of the record label and rest of the band against the inexorable wave of artistic progression Brian was bringing to the fore. Ironically, **Pet Sounds**, an LP that shook the rock world and ignited a mad scramble on the part of the rest of the exemplars of the chart milieu to wrangle with the new rules, became the focus point of resistance. It wouldn't be until decades later that its successor, the legendary and half-mythical **Smile**, would emerge and prove how everyone but Brian (and Van Dyke Parks and a few others) had been dead wrong. One wonders just what might have happened in a better world, in an environment where the insane demands of an increasingly diseased capitalism did not hold sway while wreaking social and artistic havoc.

As has become customary with SI, **Songwriter** is a smooth, fast-paced, harmonious presentation that views exactly as a good book reads. The continuing presence of Thomas Arnold as voiceover narrator in their output is a godsend, the anchor maintaining an even keel as the story's waters here get choppy and threaten to rush up over the gunwales. In the time covered, though, an interesting disparity arose: as Wilson & Co. sophisticated, their appeal in Europe grew while diminishing back home. This did little to palliate the clamor of the label and crew but provided prognostication of times to come in the entire music world. The days of saccharine pop were closing and those who wished to keep head above water would have to reach beyond yesterday in order to remain in place. This did not happen to the Beach Boys but Wilson nonetheless set the trends as a hungry world waited and waited.

An array of insiders, collaborators, lookers-on, and others provide florid details as to the dicey nature of the entire enterprise. Mark Volman (Turtles, Flo & Eddie, Zappa), Fred Vail (manager), Stephen Kalinich (poet, musician), Danny Hutton (3 Dog Night), Hal Blaine (The Wrecking Crew) and others all reminisce upon the hectic nervous days and nights as the group and its main writer struggled and sweated. The epoch was a roller coaster, and none could predict what would happen next. One thing, though, kept popping up: the abandoned **Smile**, a version of which had become **Smiley Smile**, kept providing a gold mine of tracks and influences. Not, ultimately, that it much mattered: as **Sunflower**, their most satisfying LP since **Pet Sounds** arose, the Beach Boys couldn't buy a break. That release did worse than the rest. The band ditched their management, hired a new guy who changed tactics radically and began to revive the ailing conglomerate, but Wilson was having none of it, and everything fell to wrack and ruin. He descended further into drug use and seclusion.

Songwriter is not a documentary for uncorking a [beer keg](#) over, it's a somber and depressing but marvelously captured time in one of rock and roll's greatest ensembles. As per wont, I've only covered the first hour, if you want to know the rest, see for yourself. No one gives away the ending of a film, nor do I, not even that of an already known historical interlude, and you can't go wrong with a *Sexy Intellectual* effort, no matter what it is, so roll up your sleeves, grab a tranquilizer, and settle in. What was once perplexing will become quite clear.

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