



Blogcritics is an online magazine, a community of writers and readers from around the globe.

Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

Movie Review: *The Beach Boys and The Satan*

Written by [James A. Gardner](#)

Published January 20, 2009



If you've ever wanted a very crisp video clip of The Chantays performing "Pipeline" ... if you've wondered what Pere Ubu's Dave Thomas thinks of the Beach Boys' version of "Sloop John B" ... if you've been consumed with curiosity about how Kim Fowley would describe the year 1965 in song ... you may find this DVD most satisfactory. On the other hand, if you seek insight into the connection between "America's Band" and cult leader Charles Manson, this film will be as confounding as its title.

The Beach Boys and The Satan is an hour-long German documentary from 1997 that devotes most of its running time to a compressed history of Brian Wilson and the band, from their earliest "surf music with vocals," through the collapse of the original *Smile* album, to Wilson's return to recording and performing. The film's premise of the Beach Boys' rise and decline as an allegory for the progression of California youth culture from *Beach Blanket Bingo* innocence to post-psychedelic burnout is a promising approach to recounting now-familiar stories. Through predominantly well-chosen clips (although the *Pulp Fiction* footage set to Dick Dale's "Misirlou" is jarringly out of context) and interviews, director Christoph Dreher successfully capsulizes an era while offering some unusual perspective on the times and the music.

Reg Shaw's observation that in 1967 the music scene experienced a massive influx of people who didn't belong establishes the context in which Charles Manson was able to insinuate himself into the Beach Boys' world. It's also the point at which the film goes off the rails with a brief account of Manson's sordid life, including gruesome footage of the Tate-LaBianca murder scene, up to Manson's current incarceration. Despite the inclusion of intriguing background on California's Satanic sub-culture, Dreher fails to establish a credible connection between the disparate elements he introduces, making "The Satan" portion of the film seem awkwardly grafted onto a completely different film.

It may be that the story Dreher attempts to tell is simply too much to cover adequately in an hour, but his approach to the material suggests he was unable to bring any new insight or context to the already documented relationship between Manson (much less Satan worshipers) and the Beach Boys. The film neglects to even mention "Cease to Exist," the Manson song the band recorded as "Never Learn Not to Love," one of the most substantial connections between them. The bands' alterations to his song and failure to acknowledge Manson in the credits (Dennis Wilson is listed as sole songwriter) are often cited as reasons for Wilson's fear of retribution from Manson; this seems like a crucial exclusion from the story.

For all its flaws, this DVD is nonetheless recommended to Beach Boys completists for the exclusive Brian Wilson interviews Dreher obtained for the film. Wilson may not reveal anything we didn't already know (*Spector rules*, *Rubber Soul* blew his mind, "Good Vibrations" is "scary stuff"), and he never so much as mentions either Manson or Satan, but any interview with this enigmatic, hugely influential musical figure is always worthwhile. For all that's been said about *Pet Sounds*, there's still nothing like hearing its mastermind describe the album as "something that would bring an adequate amount of love to the world." Too bad the film didn't devote its entire running time to the Beach Boys and leave "the Satan" out of it.

James A. Gardner is, and has been for quite a while.

Comments