

**GRADING
SCALE:**★★★★★
CLASSIC★★★★★
EXCELLENT★★★★
GOOD★★★
FAIR★
POOR**REVIEWS**

build in intensity, taking the listener on a pop-rock joyride that is sure to please.

The album closes with the one-two-three punch of “The Wonder” (a big ballad that finds Johnstone showing off his supple falsetto on the chorus), a mid-tempo Beach Boys/Beatles-influenced charmer called “Nothing Can Come Between Us” (which features more falsetto, bells, piano, lovely backing vocals and a “Hey Jude”-like extended vamp at the close) and “Cuckoo Interlude,” which wraps things up on a whimsical, *Smile*-inflected note. Ironically, one of the most endearing left-coast pop records to come down the pike in quite some time has been put together with loving care by a Brit. Go figure. www.breweryrecords.com

— John M. Borack

The B-52's*Funplex*

Astralwerks (28730)

Grade: ★★★

The B-52's' first album in 16 years pumps up the volume, cranks the guitars and rocks harder than anything the veteran group has done since its 1979 debut.

There's nothing on *Funplex* as sweet or as catchy as “Roam” or “Love Shack,” which made these unlikely new-wave rejects global stars at the end of the '80s. But, the playful bounce of the grooves and the heavenly harmonies of Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson in songs like “Pump” and “Hot Corner” propel this intergalactic party-starter. Meanwhile, nasal-voiced Fred Schneider injects lines like “Faster, pussycat! Thrill, thrill!” throughout. www.astralwerks.com

— Michael Gallucci

Dennis Wilson*Pacific Ocean Blue:**Legacy Edition*

Epic/Caribou/Legacy (EK 707916)

Grade: ★★★★★

As *Pacific Ocean Blue* has been out of print for many years, and thus commanding high prices on the collector's market (and more than a few bootlegs), it would have been enough for most fans had the album simply been reissued. But, this Legacy Edition goes one step further, serving up an entire second disc of bonus material, in this case the tracks Wilson was working on for a follow-up album, provisionally titled *Bambu*.

Though it was brother Brian who received most of the artistic kudos as the Beach



Eika Aoshima/Reprise Records

Boys' chief songwriter, it was Dennis who became the first of the group to release a solo record. The opening track, “River Song,” might make you think you're listening to a Beach Boys number, given the rich vocal harmonies and melodious piano (Wilson handles keyboards throughout). But, there's an appealing roughness to Wilson's voice that makes his work quite different from the Beach Boys' inherent sweetness (though, sadly, that roughness was partially due to Wilson's lifestyle of indulgence that would eventually claim his life). There's a bittersweet quality to the material that makes love songs like “Thoughts of You” tug on the heartstrings; he also mixes it up funky style on “Dreamer,” while “Time” starts as a ballad, then bursts into a jazzy horn-laden sequence, and even at just over two and a half minutes, “Pacific Ocean Blues” (note the additional “s”) is the kind of mini-suite that wouldn't have been out of place on *Pet Sounds*.

It's hard to say how *Bambu* would have turned out had it been released; what we're

left with are songs and melodies that were being considered for the album. Wilson's voice is increasingly soulful (as on “It's Not Too Late”), and compared with *Pacific Ocean Blue*, the mood is, in general, a lot mellower. It's intriguing to wonder what might have happened with the instrumental “Common” and the largely instrumental “Are You Real” (and “Piano Variations on ‘Thoughts of You’” is lovely piece that stands on its own). But one can't help noticing the tiredness in Wilson's voice on other tracks, like “Wild Situation,” and, despite its musical bounciness, “Constant Companion.” There's also a version of “Holy Man” with a new vocal by Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins, who you'd swear was Wilson if the album credits didn't say otherwise.

Nonetheless, it's a fascinating look at the most musically unheralded of the Beach Boys, with both final songs and works in progress on display. A must-have for fans, and an album well worth discovering for others.

— Gillian G. Gaar

Chicken Shack*Stan Would Rather Go Live*

Angel Air (268) CD/DVD

Grade: ★★★★★

Back in a day-glo age, Chicken Shack clucked up the U.K. chart with its pure British blues sound. Decades passed, but the Shack remained, regularly re-opened by the band's founding member, Stan Webb, whose vision has never altered or faltered.

He and his current flock of Chickens were captured live on tape and film for the two-disc CD/DVD *Stan Would Rather Go Live* set. Trotting out their hits, blues standards (some of which Shack made their own long ago), and a few surprises (a seething cover of Nine Inch Nails' “Hurt”), this was a night to remember.

There's a basket full of highlights within — “The Thrill Has Gone”'s gorgeous guitar work, “Spoonful”'s heaping helping of fiery leads, the psychedelic garb draped over “The

Reviews continued on page 60