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# **To Catch a Wave: The Beach Boys and Rock Historiography**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, and the research contained herein is of my own composition, except where explicitly stated in the text, and was not previously submitted for any other degree or professional qualification at this or any other university.

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Luis A. Sánchez, 16 June, 2011

## Abstract

From the release of their first single “Surfin’” in 1961 to the release of the album *Pet Sounds* in 1966, rock history traces the arc of the American rock group the Beach Boys in broad terms of the early-sixties Southern California surf music trend and the revolutionary effects of the Beatles’ stateside arrival in 1964. Typical claims for progress, autonomy, the significance of the album, and myths of authenticity in the study of the emergence of the rock concept, however, tend to promote an essentialist understanding of what rock music is about and what it is for. This study proposes an alternative narrative in which the regulating dichotomies of rock—art versus commerce, seriousness versus schlock, the authentic versus the inauthentic—are historicized, in the case of the Beach Boys’ transition from surf band to a complex studio recording project, as matters of creative practice and conflicting sensibilities. Questioning the conventional wisdom of rock history, this project suggests a counter-story about the significance of creative achievement, failure, and advancement.

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For patiently putting up with four years of my rambling and scrambling, love and apologies go to my family in West Texas.

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## Introduction

It was meant to be funny. Two guys in police costumes, complete with dark aviator sunglasses and mustaches, enter through the front door. We follow them as they troll through a circuit of rooms in a big, Spanish style mansion. They arrive at a large bedroom where a dazed, haggard bear of a man, draped in a teal bathrobe, sits at the edge of a king-sized bed in the center of the room, talking on the phone. He glares at the two intruders, one short, one tall, and hangs up the phone.

“We’re from the highway patrol surf squad,” announces short officer. “We have a citation for you here, sir, under section 936-A of the California ‘Catch A Wave’ statute,” says tall officer in campy officiousness tones. “You’re in violation of paragraph 12: neglecting to surf, neglecting to use a state beach for surfing purposes, and otherwise avoiding surfboards, surfing, and surf.”

Big guy in the bathrobe does not look well. Swollen, unshaven, greasy, he could use some sprucing up. Not entirely convincing, his response spills from the corner of his mouth like a muffled temper tantrum. “*Surfing?! I don’t want to go surfing!* Now look, you guys, I’m not going! You’ll get your hair wet, you get sand in your shoes, okay. I’m not going.”

The surf squad isn’t fazed. They have a job to do. In rehearsed lockstep cadence, they press on, more demand than request. Short officer: “Come on, Brian. Let’s go surfin’ now.” Tall officer: “Everybody’s learnin’ how.” “Come on a safari with us,” they finish in unison. Suddenly without protest, bathrobe guy rises from his bedside. Towering above of the officers, swollen paunch exposed half a step ahead of him, he is escorted out of the room in resignation. “Alright, okay, let’s go. Let’s go surfin’,” he mutters. The characters in the police costumes are played by comedians John Belushi and Dan Akroyd. The sorry man in the bathrobe is Brian Wilson.

On cue, the Beach Boys’ unmistakable “Surfin’ Safari” kicks in. Mike Love sings through his nose about the sport all the cool kids are into. Carl Wilson does his best Chuck Berry, and the rest of the guys ooh and ahh their way in signature Beach Boys harmony. This is the soundtrack for the rest of the sequence. We watch the surf

squad officers transport the perp in a patrol car, bright yellow surfboard fastened to the roof, from his Bel Air home to an open Southern California beach spot.

When they get to edge of the water, Brian pauses for a moment, surfboard gripped under his arm, bathrobe flapping in the sea breeze. He gazes blankly at the waves. Knowing what comes next, it's difficult to tell whether his stance is one of muted panic or if he's planting himself in a very Zen attitude. The surf squad escorts him into the water, and the next part is hard to watch. Brian belly-slides his way onto the board but can't seem to find his vertical bearings. The waves don't look particularly dangerous. Still, they toss him around a little bit, and he clutches the edges of the plank for support. After a few seconds of this humiliating clumsiness, Brian shambles his way back onto dry land. "Surfin' Safari" fades out, the last shot fades to black, and I think we're supposed to be laughing now. But the scenario unfolds like some kind of cop show parody train wreck. Something is off.

This whole stunt is a comedy sketch produced for American television as part of an elaborate, late-seventies promotional campaign advanced by the Beach Boys' then-current record label, Warner Brothers/Reprise. You can see it in the obscure documentary, *The Beach Boys: An American Band* (1985), inserted near the end almost like a random curiosity in an otherwise celebratory film. The production is actually a key plot point in the group's "Brian is Back" period of 1976. For as long as Brian had been away from the center of the group's musical decisions—mired in mental illness and substance abuse since the heydays of 1967—the Beach Boys languished in the pop marketplace. Their last big record was "Good Vibrations." Monterey and Woodstock passed them by. They endured the late-sixties rock era by touring quietly, recording some good and not-so-good records with and without brother Bri at the wheel; but by the turn of the decade the Beach Boys basically reinvented themselves as a band. If the big success of the 1975 double-album anthology of their early '60s, era-defining records, *Endless Summer*, combined with renewed public interest in those songs during live shows was any indication of where their current audience was at, it seemed the mood was right to revisit that music properly. And for that, they needed Brian.

The surf squad comedy bit was conceived by *Saturday Night Live* architect/executive producer, Lorne Michaels. Sketches like this one are still pulled

off every weekend during a season of *Saturday Night Live (SNL)*, a comedy sketch show, broadcasted live on the NBC network to a national audience from a television studio at Manhattan's Rockefeller Center. Each show gives a current celebrity or public figure a chance to act the fool within a context of fleet-footed comedy craft. The best thing about *SNL* productions is their potential to imaginatively reshuffle incongruous pieces of the national consciousness, worn or not yet accessible, into fluid pop currency. When they work, they're gold. The quickest route to memory at this particular moment was "Surfin' Safari." But watching an unwell Brian Wilson—the guy responsible for turning a Southern California mythos into a musical legacy, or, perhaps, the other way around—attempt to ride a surfboard to one of the Beach Boys' defining records, and pathetically fail, is somehow too unwieldy, even for the *SNL* sensibility. The punch line shows none of the empathy that this kind of burlesque demands. Worse, the final images of a sopping, disheveled Brian Wilson not only fail to revive "Surfin' Safari," they show a misunderstanding of it.

For better and worse, the Beach Boys' music represents a particular American romance—a composite image of post-WWII affluence, the golden exuberance of Southern California surf, suburban teenage mobility, burgers and milkshakes, drive-in movie dalliance, knuckle-headed high school social politics. For rock critic Dave Marsh, perhaps the biggest offense of the Beach Boys' musical legacy is that it articulates a kind of white, suburban middle-classness without guilt ([1978] 1985). For Marsh, songs like "Fun, Fun, Fun" and "California Girls" proffer an image of America that gloss over a complicated history of racism and social inequality in the name of fun. "But fun—what's that? Certainly not everything that's pleasurable or enjoyable, because that might include, for instance, reading books," he quips (*Ibid.*, 121). The greatest power of the conceit is that it implies a lack of challenge or conflict. Everything happens too easily. Writing in 1978 during the flashpoint of punk, Marsh finishes his argument by suggesting that the historical line that runs from the Beach Boys to the then-current strain of California-based pop is detectable as nothing more than "eternal petulance," dismissing the music as the very "antithesis" of rock (*Ibid.*).

The Beach Boys emerged in conjunction with an expanding pop industry lead by teenagers with money to burn, flourishing alongside the success of popular

movies and television programs in a period when the Golden State of California loomed large in national consciousness. Within a relatively short period in the early-1960s, the Beach Boys' sound and image powerfully articulated a model for teenage conformity—an impossible dream that fun can be its own self-contained world. Cultural critic Greil Marcus effectively summarizes all of these aspects of the Beach Boys' musical character less sternly as a version of America's "open naïveté" (1975, 114). This is a highly suggestive critical concept, certainly malleable and open to interpretation; Marcus's critical pen writes mainly in terms of exceptional observation rather than strict theoretical proposition. I deploy "open naïveté" as a descriptive term at face value, acknowledging the complex, mutually constitutive movements of American capitalist expansion *and* aesthetic possibilities that underpin it. Counter to the entrenchments of rock writers such as Marsh, I take the Beach Boys' "open naïveté" for granted as an aesthetic proposition worthy of critical review. And that is where this thesis begins.

As a work of academic study, what I have written embodies an attempt to integrate two rather unwieldy interests. During the formative phases, my research was led mainly by open-ended questions about the nature of creativity. Broadly, I was concerned with how modern (i.e., late nineteenth-century onwards) accounts of the creative artistic process—defined loosely but certainly understood as a special kind of activity carried out by a special type of person (Becker 1982)—are constructed *as stories* and how creativity operates as a cultural value. Separately, I was interested in the ways in which rock music criticism often gets masked as rock history, and vice versa. Unless this aspect of rock culture goes unacknowledged, I don't believe it should be an impediment to the academic study of popular music. For the sake of this thesis, I use the term 'rock' to represent a set of commonly applied, though loosely defined, aesthetic values and judgments, denoted by particular events and figures often posited against those events and figures that denote contrary, easy 'pop' values. Though it is historically tied to the world journalism, much of what can be labeled 'rock criticism' or 'rock writing' relies on elements of myth (a delicate mix of fact and fiction), as well as the usage of symbol, and successions of images mediated and interpreted. This thesis aims to be conversant with these traits of rock

writing while deploying a methodological apparatus indicative of the cultural historian; for that reason, it generally defers usage of theoretical, sociological models of cultural production and consumption. The form it takes reflects an endeavor to understand a relationship between what I conceive as a narrative about culturally, historically situated creative proprietorship—the personal acquisition and nimble application of special knowledge and skills that embody qualities of practicability, bravado, and indirection, in matters both artistic and commercial—and the mainly public life of a kind of musical experience as it was documented during a significant period in the history of American popular culture.

Put another way, I begin with the assumption that ‘rock history’ is a problematic term that invites revision, and that such a task can be appropriately achieved using the combined methods of cultural history and rock criticism. To plot a narrative, I necessarily consider a broad range of archival materials, film and video footage, and recorded music in order to examine, conceptualize, and speculate about certain rhetorical devices and polemics native to the world of rock writing. Though I write about people, events, and music from an historical remove, I do not waive the relevant task of playing certain conventions of history, biography, and mythology against the reflexive quirks and investments of my own public and private musical tastes.

What follows, then, is a work of cultural history that examines the Beach Boys in their social, musical, and commercial context. It is neither a simple chronicle of events nor an attempt to comprehensively cover their body of musical work. It is laid out, more or less, according to a narrative logic, but it is not an attempt at straight rock narrative. By treating certain focal points and themes with a loose handle, it seeks to use the familiar content of rock narrative as a means to explore other concepts. Throughout, I examine a variety of sounds and images with the assumption that commercial and aesthetic values are directly related and that the meaningful effects of popular music remain relevant not despite marketplace expectations but because of them. Decisions about continuity, inclusion and exclusion, beginnings and endings are a necessary evil in plotting any history, and, to that extent, this project is no different. However, some familiar points of reference have been deliberately shifted, attenuated or amplified in order to accommodate

varying themes and ideas, suggesting that there are alternative ways of telling the Beach Boys' story. In that sense, it is also commentary on the way rock narratives tend to be written.

If there is a central narrative arch, it follows an exploration of the Beach Boys' "open naïveté"—gleaned from recordings, performance footage, their roles as musical agents in the story—from a prehistory in Southern California, across an anticipatory moment in the history of American popular music, and ending in the year 1967. Throughout, I emphasize qualities of the Beach Boys' music that are at variance with the purported oppositional values of rock culture. By considering the undercurrents of earnestness and credulousness evident in the group's musical pursuits, I argue that stock terms of cultural step and counter-step are not as fixed as prevailing rock histories would claim. Chapter One traces relevant concepts of Southern California mythmaking, how it moved to the center of the pop economy in early 1960s America, and the Beach Boys' emergence from it. The second chapter follows the creative pursuits of the group's eminent leader, Brian Wilson, in terms of musical acquisition and cultural reach. Here, I was interested mainly in exploring Brian's unlikely musical interests, particularly his taste for what may be viewed as outdated pop idioms, the relevance of producer Phil Spector to Brian's acquiring of creative knowledge, and how these pursuits were pivotal to the Beach Boys' leader's attainment of honorific, artistic pop distinction. Chapters One and Two are meant to set up key themes, concepts, and expositional plot points developed through the following three chapters.

Chapter Three focuses on pivotal events that occurred in 1965, a year when the flow of mainstream American pop, under the influence of folk singers and British arrivals, started to bend. There, I frame an important historical moment in terms of an anxious, open marketplace, when success on the pop playing field entailed a capacity for watchfulness and advancement. Chapter Four traces the recording and release of the two seminal Beach Boys recordings, *Pet Sounds* and "Good Vibrations," from a decidedly non-rock perspective. That is to say, I historicize these records not as instances of inevitable musical progress but as creative endeavors fraught with aesthetic and marketplace contingency. Chapter Five considers the Beach Boys' legendary unfinished *Smile* album against the incipient 'rock revolution' hyped by

media outlets of the time. With insight from Van Dyke Parks, Brian's chief creative collaborator of that period, this chapter considers the stakes of the *Smile* project, its exploration of Americana, and what the album's incompleteness suggests about the Beach Boys' investment in the emergent rock culture.

Perhaps more than any other moment, it is the historical convergence of the Beatles and Bob Dylan that provides a framework for idealized notions of rock authenticity—a sense of artistic composure and countercultural seriousness. They figure heavily as characters in Chapters Three, Four, and Five for that reason.

By choosing 1967 as the cut off, this narrative admittedly risks falling afoul of an historical faith in certain cultural watersheds and what they represent. If *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and the Summer of Love remain obligatory cues in the history of rock music, this story considers what happened, what was gained, as well as what was lost, before things got so serious. The concluding chapter stands apart to reflect on the central narrative, what it suggests for further academic research and the study of popular music and, in particular, the concept of authenticity. There I also consider why contradictions central to the mystification of art and commerce are indispensable to the construction of rock narratives.

I began this project in September 2007 as an American postgrad student, studying abroad in Edinburgh, Scotland. Over the following three years, I duly took advantage of my location to grab and absorb other perspectives and sensibilities, thrashing out my own in the process. It just so happened that this period in a foreign country coincided with a very big U.S. presidential election. While I never thought of myself as an expatriate, watching this event unfold at a cultural remove was a bizarre experience. Speaking in my American accent never felt so awkward than during the fall of 2008, and, at times, I found it tricky to find my social bearings. Surrounded by the unfamiliar throughout this three-year period, I was pulled and baffled by aspects of my native culture in ways that wouldn't have made sense under different circumstances. Which is to say, what I have written in these pages inevitably bears the marks of my own mulling over relevant questions of American identity and disposition.

Throughout the writing process I kept near to me three particular texts as reliable sounding boards. Together, they undeniably influenced my overall thought process and the way I approached my subject matter. Two of them—author Thomas Frank’s 1997 monograph, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, and *New York Times* journalist John Leland’s 2004 study, *Hip: The History*—are, in my opinion, admirable examples of cultural historical scholarship, conveyed effectively in two distinct prose styles. It is impossible to fully account in this space for the influence of the third. Cultural critic Greil Marcus’s blazing *Mystery Train* (2005 revised edition) was not only a gold mine of insight and inspiration but also much-appreciated company during moments when I felt particularly like an American werewolf in Edinburgh.

## Chapter One: Of Los Angeles, Surfboards, Teenagers, and Beach Boys

In one place we came upon a large company of naked natives, of both sexes and all ages, amusing themselves with the national pastime of surf-bathing. [. . .] I tried surf-bathing once, subsequently, but made a failure of it. I got the board placed right, and at the right moment, too; but missed the connection myself – the board struck the shore in three quarters of a second, without any cargo, and I struck the bottom about the same time, with a couple of barrels of water in me. None but natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly.

--Mark Twain, describing the surf at Honaunau, Hawaii, in *Roughing It*, 1872

But I just gotta have one of those boards. I've just *got* to!

--Frances 'Gidget' Lawrence, played by Sandra Dee, *Gidget*, 1959

Last year, when a group of sun-tanned youngsters recorded a song about their favorite sport, they had no idea that the tune was destined to ride a wave of popularity that would rival that of the sport itself. But just like the hair-raising seaside pastime for which it is named, the song *Surfin'* became an overnight sensation, and the surprised teenagers who had sung it suddenly found themselves on their way to fame and fortune.

Here, then, in their debut album on Capitol, are the rockin', rollin' kids who have made the biggest splash along the Pacific shores since the sport of surfing was discovered . . . The dynamic Beach Boys!

--*Surfin' Safari* album liner notes, 1962

I went by one of the guitar booths, and there was a little kid in there, about thirteen, playing the hell out of an electric guitar. The kid was named Cranston something or other. He looked like he ought to be named Kermet or Herschel; all his genes were kind of horribly Okie. Cranston was playing away and a big crowd was watching. But Cranston was slouched back with his spine bent like a sapling against a table, looking gloriously bored. At thirteen, this kid was being fanatically cool. They all were. They were all wonderful slaves to form.

--Tom Wolfe, describing the Los Angeles Teen-Age Fair in  
 "There Goes (VAROOM! VAROOM!) That Kandy Kolored (THPHHHHHH!)  
 Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (RAHGHHHH!) Around the Bend  
 (BRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM).....,"  
*Esquire*, 1963

On August 7, 1907, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a cheerful headline. “Smile, Rich Programme of Venice Fun. Beach Town Offers Happy Day to Angelenos,” it read. The following day, Saturday, was declared a local holiday by mayor of Los Angeles, A.C. Harper. The purpose of the holiday was not to mark a tradition or commemorate some important piece of history but to simply celebrate the flourishing place of Los Angeles, California. As Harper said, “The occasion will give every Angeleno who feels so inclined an opportunity to join with his neighbor in the celebration of ‘Los Angeles Day’ here” (Ibid.) It was a good time for local business. The center of the celebration, Venice, was founded by a man named Abbott Kinney two years earlier. Kinney was a land developer sojourning in Southern California when he was inspired by the open-ended potential of the land and climate. Complete with canals, a promenade in an outlying location, and thanks to fine weather, Kinney envisioned his own version of the Italian Venice as a beach side resort town. And it worked. For Los Angeles Day, Mayor Harper, along with members of the Los Angeles City Council and Chamber of Commerce, planned to meet the local officials and businessmen of Venice in a public gesture of generosity in which the key to their city would be offered to the officials of Los Angeles.

Venice was a place that could fittingly accommodate the “entertainment and edification of visitors, who are expecting to flock to the beach in record-breaking numbers,” as the *Los Angeles Times* predicted (Ibid.). Among the welcoming of city officials, the food, and the live music, a selection of aquatic activities and exhibitions were also advertised. The majority of these were aquatic-based athletic events such as swimming and gondola, rowboat, and canoe racing. The real star of the show, however, was man named George Freeth, “the Hawaiian boy life-saver, now of Venice,” who would demonstrate not only “fancy diving and high diving,” but something even more captivating (Ibid.). Freeth, of course, was to lead an exhibition of the stylish sport of “surf-board riding” (Ibid.).

It wasn’t the first appearance of surfing in California. Two decades earlier, a crew of Hawaiian surfers named Jonah, David and Edward Kalaniana’ole, who also happened to be the adopted children of Hawaii’s Queen Lili’uokalani, first surfed the beaches of Santa Cruz in 1885. The difference in 1907 was that Freeth’s Los Angeles Day exhibition benefited from the hype generated by an article recently published in

the popular publication *Women's Home Companion* written by author Jack London. The article was based on London's first-hand experiences with Freeth in Hawaii, where the half-Irish native of the island schooled the writer one-on-one in the sport of riding ocean waves.

London elaborated on his surfing experiences in *The Cruise of The Snark*, a 1911 travelogue recounting his ocean adventures from San Francisco through the Pacific. Overtaken by the feeling of what London called a "Royal Sport," his writings reflected a deep respect for Freeth's skills and a contagious impulse for ennobling excitement: "Go to. Strip off your clothes that are a nuisance in this mellow clime. Get in and wrestle with the sea; wing your heels with the skill and power that resides in you, bite the sea's breakers, master them, and ride upon their backs as a king should" ([1911] 2002 84). For the American public who didn't know about surfing, London's writings framed it with vibrancy and fascination. Here was a way to feel vigorously, precariously in tune with the natural elements, distinct from dry land activity. And even if readers couldn't experience surfing first hand, they could admire the imagery London created. Freeth turned London on to something that was more than just a sport, and the writer turned the surfer into something of a celebrity. In return for sharing his knowledge and experience, London also provided Freeth with a letter of introduction when the latter sought to relocate from Hawaii to California in July 1907.

The celebrity surfer arrived in the sunny clime of Southern California at an opportune moment. The storied development of Los Angeles coastal areas was largely based on the advantages that their coastal locations and fantastic weather posed for magnates and developers (Heimman and Star 2010). Los Angeles Day was a prime example of the kind of strategies used by officials to draw visitors and custom to restorative seaside resort sites like Venice that were emerging at that time. In the context of local promotion, the people of Los Angeles were introduced to surfing as a novelty with the unique potential to flourish. No other water sport could have been more likely to become a fixture in popular imagination and just one of the alluring attractions to the Southern California way of life.

In 1907, Freeth was just beginning to share his love for the open waters. He continued proselytizing locals over the next decade with more surfing exhibitions

while committing himself to the cause of water safety education. Among Freeth's more notable achievements were the establishment of the first modern lifeguard corps in Southern California and national recognition for his demonstration of lifesaving skill. His overall approach to the open water was based on a naturalist philosophy that advocated self-mastery and inner alignment with the movements of the tide. More than anything, Freeth's legacy was that of a levelheaded athletic achiever who erred on the side of caution, avoiding danger and risk. As the godfather of the California surfer, he embodied rectitude but little style.

It wasn't until California surfing converged with postwar 1950s counterculture and popular movies that the ideal image of the California surfer emerged. What Freeth lacked in attitude emanated freely in the stylings of Miki Dora, whose natural talents for wave-riding were only amplified by the roguish mystique he cultivated at Malibu in the early 1960s. Dora grew up in Los Angeles in an unconventional family. His father had Hollywood connections and it wasn't uncommon for young Miki to find himself in the company of actors and other industry types. During his teenage years, Dora often skipped school to do what he wanted, and that mainly included surfing. By the time his impossible-to-ignore surfing style earned him a local reputation, he was hip to the California entertainment industry as much as he was hip to the world of loafing.

As a personality Dora existed somewhere between conventional society and the world of the lone maverick, traversing oceans and continents, yet never too sanctimonious about his sport to pass on the commercial potential of his surfer image. From time to time, he took work as a surf stunt performer in Hollywood movies, cashing in on public interest. Dora's quiet presence in key early-'60s surf movies like *Beach Party*, *Muscle Beach Party*, *Bikini Beach*, and *Ride the Wild Surf* put him at the center of a pop culture phenomenon that both attracted and repelled him. Though his talents in the water were untouchable, he continually sought ways to outmaneuver his detractors and advance ahead of the crowd. Cultivating a kind of noble Southern California consciousness, Dora conformed neither to mainstream nor fringe sensibility and latched on to whatever system suited his needs at a particular moment.

Though Dora pulled it off well, this dance with integrity and risk didn't belong to him alone. Hollywood had struck gold with these themes when the movie *Gidget* was released to an audience of wide-eyed teenagers in the spring of 1959. Dora, in fact, worked as a stunt performer for this movie. Based on the 1957 best-selling novel of the same name, which was itself based on the actual experiences of the novelist's daughter, *Gidget* the movie chronicled the adventures of Francie, a straight-A, respectable, diminutive sixteen year-old, Southern California girl.

Eager to enter the social ranks of her more sexually aware peers, Francie is convinced by her girlfriends at the beginning of one summer that unless she slough off her prissiness, she'll be shunned as a social pariah when they return to school in the fall. What begins as an organized manhunt with the girls derails into a lone desire to be initiated into a crew of local surfers. Francie catches the attention of one in particular, an aspiring surf bum named Moondoggie. He nicknames her 'Gidget' (a girl midget), and convinces the rest of the crew to educate her on the ins and outs of riding waves. Comedic romance ensues.

What Francie isn't prepared for is the more complicated aspects of the surfers' philosophy as articulated by Kahuna, a former U.S. Air Force pilot, and, at thirty-something, the crew's reluctant elder. Explaining his decision to opt out of the "chains of work" so he can "follow the sun" towards the surfing possibilities on the coasts of Peru or Hawaii, Kahuna ruffles Gidget's square, suburban outlook ([1959] 2004). But he fails to convince Gidget. More aware than her age suggests, she flips these musings by explaining Kahuna's drifter ethos back to him in terms of unproductive loneliness. Eventually the pressures of social group status dull the allure of surf bum life. By the end of the movie, even Moondoggie—now revealed as Jeffrey Matthews, university student!—can't bear the hassle of nonconformity for nonconformity's sake. He gives his fraternity pin to Francie as a clear sign of his devotion. Now she can eagerly return to the halls of her high school with some social insurance.

When the movie isn't implying an awkward empathy for Kahuna's bohemian impulses, it goes a step further by transposing the anxiety behind those impulses into an ambition for Moondoggie. Too young to share in Kahuna's wartime disillusionment, Moondoggie's claim to outsider status is motivated by a desire to

break away from the looming shadow of his self-made, successful father. Ill-defined, yet felt clearly enough, the aspiration to live counter to conventional society is potent for Moondoggie; it offers him a story about himself, with an integrity alternative to the suck of mass conformity and stark Puritan work ethic. Yet Gidget and Moondoggie opt for the latter when the promise of boy-meets-girl romance beckons both of them back to the safety of suburbia and university halls.

As models for the movie's young audience, the characters dutifully heed the call to respectability but not without first grabbing their portion of fun. And nothing reflected that teenage experience of fun more persuasively than the movie's idealized California backdrop. Audiences agreed. The *Los Angeles Times* claimed both the novel and the film's depictions of "remarkable teen-agers" were setting a "new style for youth"; within a year of the movie's release, it was reported that local L.A. high schools were organizing their own productions of *Gidget* to play for their classmates (1959, 1960). Through a succession of images and a story where the heroine gains enough enlightenment that we respect her, but not so much that it erases our wish for a happy ending, the movie gave shape to an attitude and brought it to the attention of a wide teenage audience.

Those potent images and themes also found their way into pop records. It wasn't an accident when, within one year *Gidget's* release, a group calling themselves the Gamblers cut a rocking instrumental for World Pacific Records and titled it "Moon Dawg." Along with the propulsive guitar, bass, piano, drum combo, the most interesting sounds on the record came from the feral dog howls provided by the record's producer, a young guy named Nik Venet. Referring itself to the *Gidget* character, the arch record combines the idea of the surfer with a sound indicative of the guitar-based instrumental style that was popular among young music makers with access to independent recording studios in Los Angeles. "Moon Dawg" wasn't an anomaly among the guitar-instrumentals of the period. Groups such as the Fireballs had already successfully isolated a metallic rock 'n' roll guitar sound and style at recording studios in Clovis, New Mexico for singles like "Torquay," while up north in Seattle, Washington, the Ventures were coming together to record their versions for singles like "Walk Don't Run." What "Moon Dawg" did that the other records

didn't was successfully fuse these sounds with a recognizable personality, in this case the Moondoggie character from the *Gidget* movie, yet it also treated the Hollywood surfer concoction with wry humor.

A set of Los Angeles-based groups followed "Moon Dawg" with similar records through 1961. The Revels' "Church Key" added saxophone, female laughter, and, for some reason, the guttural repetition of the words "church key." "Mr. Moto" was a more relaxed instrumental recorded by the Belairs; with the same instrumentation, this one toned down the sarcasm in favor of cool restraint. Next came the Frogmen's "Underwater," which plays like rocker designed for the dance floor. The rhythmic frogs' croaking matched by saxophone gave this instrumental its own levity.

These independent records appeared, more or less, as wagers for modest local success, and it was the exception rather than the rule for any of them to break nationally. Unlike the Fireballs and the Ventures, the groups behind the records were more like extensions of the records themselves. If not entirely made up of teenagers, they were mainly studio-based concoctions of young men brought together by a shared interest in trying their hand at making a record happen.

"Record producer" wasn't yet a clearly defined role when Venet's interest in music began. The American-born son of Greek immigrants, he trained his ears from a young age to recognize a good tune and predict the life span of records that played out of his family's restaurant jukebox. Moving from his hometown of Baltimore, Venet haphazardly gained experience during his teenage years working in places like Shreveport, Louisiana, pulling together recordings for various acts and hustling the product through places like Chicago until he found labels that were convinced. A brief stint navigating New York City's Brill Building pop factory added to Venet's professional resumé before he finally arrived in California. He spent several years successfully working A&R for smaller labels in Los Angeles, most notably Keen and World Pacific, by the time he secured a position at Capitol Records in 1960. At that time, the twenty-one-year-old Venet was among the youngest staff producers the major label had ever seen.

Outside the recording studio, the popularity of surf records converged with the identifiable surf image of Dick Dale. When he made the move from the East Coast to El Segundo, California in the mid'50s, Dale brought with him more tutored musicianship and performance skill than business initiative. In contrast to Venet, Dale's musical background consisted of a knowledge of piano, trumpet, ukulele and country guitar-playing. As a musician, he gained local notoriety as a gigging country guitar player and recorded several singles for Del-Tone, a small label owned by his father, before he found his way to the Balboa surf scene and learned how to ride waves. As a surfer, Dale struck a grand, stylized image making him stand out as a likeable personality. Combined with the way he persuasively wielded an electrified guitar, this image set him up for a chance at real celebrity.

Opportunity came when Dale landed a regular gig at the Rendezvous Ballroom in Balboa (the former residence of jazz orchestra leader Stan Kenton), where he and his Del-Tones band played rowdy shows for a crowd of teenage regulars. These gigs put Dale in contact with a consistent audience for whom he could test new tunes, but the acoustic space of the Rendezvous itself, big and resonant, made it difficult for his music to carry through crowd noise. Looking for a solution, he went into collaboration with electric guitar developer Leo Fender, and together they looked for ways to amplify Dale's guitar so that it could be heard without degrading sound quality (White 1996). The result was the Showman amplifier, a device designed specifically for the purpose of making his guitar sound big and mighty. When used in conjunction with a prototype portable reverb unit that processed his frenetic guitar-playing, the deep-soaked twang reverberated just so and became the defining characteristic of his surf music sound.

It was Dale's records that focused all of these elements into something cohesive and in the process codifying the image of the California surfer into a musical language. "Let's Go Trippin'," Dale's first hit instrumental released as a single in the summer of 1961, was based on a combination of highly-charged live show feeling, audience presence and reverb-washed guitar sound. *Surfer's Choice*, Dale's first full album with the Del-Tones, was recorded mostly live at the Rendezvous Ballroom, and released independently on Del-Tone in 1962. Though a few studio overdubs were added later, part of the album's appeal comes from what

can be heard of audience noise at various moments, adding the necessary noise for the album's 'live' aesthetic. With a album cover photo shot by independent photographer/filmmaker/surfer, John Severson, showing a well-toned Dale himself surfing in the Pacific, the album presents itself as a confluence of the guitar-based instrumental and the vigor of local live shows. With the inclusion of "Let's Go Trippin'" together with a balanced selection of similar tunes (some of which became surf standards as they were re-recorded later by other acts, including the Beach Boys), *Surfer's Choice* incorporated Dale's signature musical personality into a larger Southern California surf aesthetic. Seeing commercial potential here, Hollywood-based major label Capitol Records signed Dale to a seven-album deal, and the company distributed *Surfer's Choice* to a wider national market in 1963.

While the energy behind records like "Moon Dawg" and *Surfer's Choice* was rooted in a localized sensibility, organized by a set of images and themes specific to Southern California, the popular success of *Gidget* implied a wider market for this content. So it seemed reasonable that Capitol Records should take notice of surf music when, in July 1962, they signed a young quintet—three brothers Brian, Dennis, and Carl Wilson, their cousin, Mike Love, and friend, David Marks—who called themselves the Beach Boys, and primed them for a wide teenage public. According to Beach Boys biographer Timothy White, the contract committed the Beach Boys for one initial year and gave Capitol the upper hand option of extending the contract over an additional six consecutive one-year periods. During the first two years, the group was obliged to deliver master recordings of a minimum of six individual songs. This number increased to a minimum of eight masters for year three, ten for year four, and twelve for years five and six. In addition to a handful of fiduciary arrangements that reflected Capitol's intention to maintain a conservative oversight of the group's activities and leverage in delegating resources, the members were signed as a group of "vocalists" (1996, 154). Overall, the terms of the contract suggested a business model that, in the case of the Beach Boys, placed neither the album format nor a notion of a creatively autonomous unit of musicians at the center of its commercial initiative. Except for releasing some records by Gene Vincent and Esquerita, Capitol remained mostly indifferent to mid-50s rock 'n' roll and the

teenage market. The label's real success was in a history of crafting quality adult pop with singers like Nat 'King' Cole and, more recently, with Frank Sinatra on sophisticated, full album productions. It wasn't until young executive Venet signed and found modest success with a young vocal group called the Letterman that Capitol seemed willing to accommodate a group like the Beach Boys. Unlike Venet and Dale, who came to California from immigrant family backgrounds on the East Coast, bringing with them a sense of business hustle, the Beach Boys arrived at Capitol like a group of bumpkins straight from the suburbs of Hawthorne, an unremarkable city in southwestern Los Angeles County, halfway between downtown L.A. and the beach. Hawthorne was little more than a pocket of underdeveloped land until the introduction of post-WWI aviation industry in the 1930s led to a massive influx of employment-seekers and residential development over the coming decades. Apart from aerospace engineering, Hawthorne could boast very little of cultural significance throughout the 1950s. Prior to the Beach Boys' success, it is unlikely anyone would have associated Hawthorne with pop ambition.

Whatever clout this set of wide-eyed suburbanites brought to their record deal was most likely attributed to two things. At the time of their signing, the Beach Boys were riding the momentum gained from "Surfin'," an original tune they recorded and released independently on the local Candix label a year earlier. Backed with a similar beach-y themed original called "Luau," the record was a local hit, spending fourteen weeks on the KFWB Fabulous Forty Survey and eventually making the number 75 spot on *Billboard's* Top 100 in March of '62 (McParland 2001a). The unlikely success of this single surpassed the expectations set by previous records coming out of the local surf music scene. The Beach Boys had potential to reach a much wider, national market.

It was Murry Wilson, aspiring songwriter and father of the three Wilson brothers, who recognized this opportunity for what it was. Murry had already shepherded the group through the recording of the "Surfin'" single with the help of family friends, Hite and Dorinda Morgan. The Morgans ran their own music publishing business and offered the inexperienced group access to their home studio recording facilities, which the group used as rehearsal space before moving shop to World Pacific Studio. There, they recorded the masters for the "Surfin'" / "Luau"

single, and then finally going to Western Recorders where they recorded several more originals—“Surfin’ Safari,” “Judy,” “Four-Oh-Nine” (later rewritten as “409”), and “Lonely Sea”—with in-house engineer Chuck Britz. In the interim, it was Murry who played the part of manager, drawing on the experience of running his own machinery business and songwriting ambitions. It was a necessary role none of the Beach Boys, who had no significant experience with the music industry prior to “Surfin’,” was equipped fill.

The unforeseen success of “Surfin’” convinced Murry and the group that something similar, potentially larger, could be possible for the latest recordings.<sup>1</sup> Once under Capitol’s roof, the Beach Boys followed “Surfin’” with a consistent flow of product pushed toward the teenage market. The release of the “Surfin’ Safari” single in June 1962 led quickly to the recording of the group’s first LP, also titled *Surfin’ Safari*, released by the end of October, and to another single—“Ten Little Indians”/“County Fair”—released in November. Within the following year alone, the Beach Boys recorded and released four more singles and three full LPs to meet demand. These numbers do not include the numerous collections of chart hits that Capitol assembled over the next couple of years to aggressively capitalize on both the surf and ensuing hot rod trends in pop records. Some of the titles just for 1963 included *Chart Busters*, *Shut Down*, *Chart Busters Vol. 2*, *Surfing’s Greatest Hits*, *Chart Busters Vol. 3*, and *Big Hot Rod Hits*.<sup>2</sup>

The first of three surf-themed LPs, *Surfin’ Safari*, effectively set the Beach Boys apart from their surf music predecessors by combining familiar sounds with an unassuming attitude. The Beach Boys’ first album is imbued with a pop sensibility that emphasized vocal quality and studio production polish in favor of Dale’s cool, stylized guitar and the ironic detachment that made “Moon Dawg” work as an instrumental. It was no accident that *Surfin’ Safari*, which credits Venet as its producer, dutifully includes a recording of “Moon Dawg.” While Venet reproduced the howling for this new version, the general attitude of the Beach Boys’ record

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<sup>1</sup> For some amusing, divergent perspectives of the business thinking context in which the Beach Boys were signed to Capitol, compare David Leaf’s 1985 biography, *The Beach Boys*, with Tom Nolan’s two-part 1976 *Rolling Stone* piece, “The Beach Boys: A California Saga, Part One: Mr. Everything” (October 28) and “Part Two: Tales of Hawthorne” (November 11).

<sup>2</sup> See Chidester and Priore 2008, and Elliott 2003.

misses all the sarcasm of the Gamblers' original. Similarly, Brian Wilson's attempt at rock 'n' roll vocal stylings on a version of Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues" shows an academic awareness of his rock 'n' roll forebears, but, like the cover of "Moon Dawg," it sounds more awkward than restive. Where these covers come off like ploys to ingratiate the album with a knowing audience, it is the group's original material that persuasively combined a set of familiar surf themes with an identifiably Beach Boys sensibility—intensely earnest, certainly inquisitive—attributable more to their unique blend of vocal harmony, successfully arranged for a recording studio setup, than with their skills on guitar, bass, and drums.

The release of *Surfin' Safari* on October 29 1962 also coincided neatly with the American public's growing enthusiasm for all things California. Ten days earlier, *Life* magazine published a special issue devoted entirely to the Golden State in an attempt to explain the recent influx of people pushing the state towards "its position as the most populous of the 50 states and portending new continental concepts." Examining key cultural figures and recent developments, the special issue claimed that modern California's pull could be explained by the relationship between its forward-thinking attitude ("uninhibited by patterns of entrenched tradition," "all future, no past" [Ibid.]) and a capacity to capitalize on resources like "the power contained in the burning sun" and "the moisture untapped in the 1,200-mile salt-water shore" (Ibid.). Though surfing is clearly feasible only in places with beaches and the right natural conditions, its iconography and vocabulary was well suited for the moment when early 1960s California was asserting itself as a vivid metaphor not just for a modern utopia but also for youth itself.<sup>3</sup>

The cover art of *Surfin' Safari* aligns well with these themes, depicting the five Beach Boys as a crew of eager surfers on board a yellow pick-up truck arriving at the beach. They are dressed in the Pendleton-shirt-and-white-Levi's combo favored by local surfers. All of them gaze in a westerly direction beyond the frame of the photograph at a view of the Pacific we must fill in with our own imaginations. The back cover features an enthusiastic introduction to the "sun-tanned youngsters," and confidently predicts that the music on the disc is "destined to ride a wave of

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting cultural historical examination of the California image in popular American imagination during this period, see Granat May 2002.

popularity” ([1962] 2001). For those buyers potentially (tragically) unaware of the sport, the notes also include a definition<sup>4</sup> of surfing to clue them in, explaining it as an activity “Especially recommended for teen-agers and all others without the slightest regard for life or limb” (Ibid.). The combined confidence and insouciance of *Surfin’ Safari*’s cover and the music on the record was limited only by its commercial appeal.<sup>5</sup>

*Surfin’ Safari* and the Beach Boys LPs that followed were just one expression of a larger pop surf culture in Southern California that centered on teenage consumers in this early ‘60s period. From a business perspective, the biggest feat of these teenagers wasn’t that they formed a predictable consumer category, but that they focused the pop market on Southern California. Surf culture began as a local phenomenon, but it rapidly etched a path into a larger pop economy that trafficked in material products as repositories for style and attitude. The clearest endorsement of the phenomenon played out in the Teen Age Fairs that took place in Los Angeles

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<sup>4</sup> “A water sport, in which the participant stands on a floating slab of wood resembling an ironing board in both size and shape, and attempts to remain perpendicular while being hurled toward the shore at a rather frightening rate of speed on the crest of a huge wave.” See *Surfin’ Safari* liner notes (1962) 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Hot rod records were, for a brief commercial moment, another viable option for the teen pop market. Though the hot rod genre aimed to be a more inclusive version of surf (one didn’t need a beach to drive a car), it seemed to arrive a year too late in 1963. The first Beach Boys hot rod tune, “409,” was released over a year earlier as the b-side to their first Capitol single, “Surfin’ Safari.” The next one, “Shut Down,” was the b-side for the “Surfin’ USA” single released in the spring of ’63, before it was included in an LP collection of hot rod tunes by various Capitol acts under the same title. *Shut Down* the album sold 170,000 copies in four months (“Surfers Find It’s a Drag.” *Los Angeles Times* October 27, 1963.) and apparently convinced the company they had the upper hand on an imminent fad. By late October, Capitol had lined up several more hot rod-themed albums for release only days apart from each other. *Little Deuce Coupe*, the Beach Boys’ fourth LP, their third for 1963, was the first. The album’s liner notes explained the shift to hot rod in terms of clued-in watchfulness, implying an in-crowd common knowledge from which one didn’t want to be excluded: “[Fans] already know from all those great past hits that the Beach Boys are the greatest. It just doesn’t matter whether they’re singing about their surfing adventures, or their current road and track winners[.] Just listen. You’ll get the message!” (CD liner notes 2001). This record was shortly followed by Dick Dale’s *Checkered Flag*, another collection of hot rod-themed songs by various performers called *Hot Rod Rally*, and a “sound’ album recorded at various drag meets” called *The Big Sounds of the Drags* (“Surfers Find It’s a Drag.” See also Elliott 2001). What can be said about the Beach Boys’ stake in the hot rod market is that their car songs were mainly the result of Brian Wilson’s songwriting collaboration with non-Beach Boy writers. “409” was co-written by an early collaborator named Gary Usher. Over half of the material for *Little Deuce Coupe* was co-written by Brian’s friend, a local L.A. DJ named Roger Christian.

annually from 1962 to 1964. The first was held over the Easter holiday at Santa Monica's popular Pacific Ocean Park (P.O.P.) boardwalk amusement center. An announcement in the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Chamber of Commerce president, Aubrey Austin, extended "a blanket invitation" to Southland teenagers to attend the ten-day fair in Santa Monica, estimating a crowd of 250,000 (April 5, 1962). The thought of so many teenagers in one place, however, caused Santa Monica Mayor, Thomas M. McCarthy, to qualify the invitation, limiting it specifically to Pacific Ocean Park in light of lingering "'get lost' attitudes of other communities toward teenagers" who still provoked public anxiety about juvenile delinquent activity (Ibid.). By the end of the ten-day event, the mayor's fears over potential teenage hooliganism proved to be unfounded when, on April 26, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that even though the number of attendees exceeded the estimated 250,000, Santa Monica Chief of Police, Earl Reinbold, had little to complain about: "Apparently they came to have a good time and thoroughly enjoyed themselves" (1962).

If the eight skydivers who opened the first year's event were any indication of the sort of pomp the Teen Fairs were capable of, the two following annual events compounded this attitude in suitably California-sized terms. Moving to the larger 15-acre space at the Pickwick Recreation Center in Burbank, the second fair included a demonstration of an aerospace rocket belt "with which a man can fly more than 100 ft," exhibitions of "the latest in surfing gear," appearances by surfing popular professionals who would provide lessons for those kids who provided "written parental consent," "a display of hot-rods in conjunction with a group of experts who will discuss custom designing of cars," "40 special fashion shows" catering to the young females, special appearances of film and recording stars, a high school battle of the bands, not to mention the fair would also be hosting the nationally televised Miss Teen U.S.A. Pageant (*Los Angeles Times* March 17, 31, 1963). A reported \$3 million was pooled to make the second Teen Fair happen (Ibid.). For its third year, the Teen Fair amassed enough sway to move to the grounds of the Palladium in Hollywood, the symbolic center of L.A. industry itself. With all the excess of the previous years, here again were innumerable booths (including one sponsored by Capitol Records for which a teenage DJ named Dave Mann was hired to lead the

young “Watusi insurgents to the tune of 33 revolutions per minute” [*Los Angeles Times* March 25, 1964), stages for popular acts including Dick Dale and the Del-Tones and other bands, and exhibitions pushing the latest in teenage “fads for sale”—fashion and automobile accessories, mainly (Ibid.).

Over three consecutively successful years, the Los Angeles Teen Fair focused California youth culture in commercial terms, referring to it as a barometer for a wider American market. Business minds couldn’t ignore the potential. Frank Danzig, one-third of a trio of entrepreneurs who conceived the idea for the Teen Fair, told the *Los Angeles Times* that he and his business partners were planning similar events for New York, Boston, Detroit and hoped to make twenty-five more fairs happen in various national markets by 1965 (April 14, 1963). Citing recent census reports and the latest industry research, the same newspaper article put some numbers into perspective: as many as 19.4 million teenagers were already spending as much as \$11 billion a year on leisure, and that number was predicted to increase to \$15 billion by 1970 (Ibid.). But the article also included some caveats: “[D]on’t talk down; avoid misrepresentation; don’t cut back on quality; and don’t be continually out of stock” (Ibid.). California teenagers had a lot to say with their spending money, but their purchases weren’t necessarily automatic.

For *Los Angeles Times* pop critic Art Seidenbaum, what the Teen Fairs indicated beyond their overt commercialism was a cultural aptitude that set these teenagers—“Not as unintelligible as their primitive sounds. Not as stratified as their hairdos” (March 25, 1964).—apart from the content of their purchases. Seidenbaum was more curious than disdainful, describing them as “experimenters who have the limited courage to try something new but the frightened need to conform to each other” (Ibid.). What they showed as a group was an unexpected capacity to find a meaningful agreement among a range of pop options, and their restlessness couldn’t be reduced to a mindless grab for a share of consumables or a uniform attitude of rebellion.

Yet even the expanded pop economy in this period couldn’t be hedged by a purity of commercial acquisition. To the degree that it relied on capitalist principles of supply and demand, the flow of this popular culture can also be seen as an economy of information, where exchange entails the circulation of images, sounds,

styles, and attitudes as well as profit. On one hand, the emergence of a group like the Beach Boys from a local, West Coast phenomenon into an immensely lucrative industry reflected a clear synchronization of industry and consumer interests. On the other hand, their music contributed to the shaping of a young, California-specific sensibility, sold to America as a set of vibrant sounds and images. Seidenbaum referred to the Beach Boys and their music as vehicles for the teenager's "complete sense of conformity within their own group; a kind of romantic idealism" that "sells surf boards to Kansas" (*Los Angeles Times* November 22, 1964).

This breach of boundaries between commercial product and the "romantic idealism" that enveloped it played out interestingly in teen culture's convergence with film and television. Where the first several Beach Boys albums codified surf into a recognizable pop sound, it was American International Pictures' *Beach Party* movie series that capitalized on its imagery and sounds by combining them with farcical comedy and selling the product well.

Founded in 1954, American International Pictures (AIP) was a releasing company that expanded into a proper studio and built a reputation for churning out cheaply made movies with absolutely no pretense for Hollywood grandeur or serious cinema, except that they intended to make money. By the early-sixties, AIP had reworked vigilance for commercial trends into a signature ethos of fleet-footed, independent studio craft with a taste for the vulgar.<sup>6</sup> The independent studio had already capitalized well on the public's appetite for sensationalism with teenage delinquency exploitation movies in the fifties and more recently with horror, best illustrated by a steady output of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations starring Vincent Price. AIP owners Sam Arkoff and Jim Nicolson were looking for something current when they approached William Asher, an experienced television producer, to develop some new projects in the summer of 1963. Asher's idea was to flip the hackneyed image of the delinquent American teenager by avoiding themes of rebellion and generational schism. Taking advantage of the local Southern California setting, Asher worked on concocting a movie plot where summer didn't end. If it needed one, the message was that adopting a young attitude made more sense than deriding it.

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<sup>6</sup> For an insightful account of AIP's creative and business practices—making movies only after launching a marketing campaign, for example—in a historical context, see McGee 1996.

*Beach Party* was released in September 1963, and it was the first of several more beach movies Asher directed for AIP. Starring pop idol Frankie Avalon as “Frankie” and Disney starlet Annette Funicello as “Dee Dee” in a story about, well, surfing, the movie marked AIP’s recently announced “turn to youth” policy (*Los Angeles Times* July 12, 1963). Filmed at sunny spots in Newport, Balboa, Laguna, and Malibu, *Beach Party* built silly comedy around the intertwining adventures of Frankie and Dee Dee as they stumble through romance, their crew of rambunctious friends, and Bob, an anthropologist caricature researching the mating rituals of the Southern California teenager. A review in the *Los Angeles Times* called the movie “a harmless little effort, really, which may amuse the stomp set which it is about, while the older folks do a sit-along that isn’t too painful” (September 12, 1963). Asher’s world of fun worked so well that, on January 2, 1964, AIP announced they had already completed a sequel to *Beach Party*, titled *Muscle Beach Party*, and were developing a third called *Bikini Beach* (*Los Angeles Times*). As an addendum, it was also reported that the company increased its annual budget to \$25 million, a 25% increase over the previous year’s, for even more beach (and horror) movies (Ibid.).

The bigger budget paid off at the grand, three-day San Francisco premiere of *Muscle Beach Party* on March 1964. In attendance the first day were Avalon and Funicello themselves, who were met by an estimated 5,000 teenagers clamoring for autographs, while a hired rock ‘n’ band played at the entrance of the Fox Warfield theater (*Los Angeles Times* April 1, 1964). Public reception of the *Beach Party* movies was more favorable than it had been for other AIP productions, yet difficult to explain solely in business terms. The audience’s insatiable appetite seemed to baffle *Los Angeles Times* critic Art Seidenbaum, whose review of *Muscle Beach Party* expressed an inability to resolve commercial concern with sociological significance: “One of the strangest things about the teen-age market is that it keeps coming back for more of the same. It may be a part of their mystic rebellion—or maybe it’s a product of having grown up at home with reruns” (Ibid.). What mattered was that AIP had touched enough of the right buttons with *Beach Party* such that *Muscle Beach Party* only confirmed this success with an unpredictable audience.

Aside from bringing back Funicello and Avalon to rehash their characters’ chemistry, AIP producers also recruited key surf music figures to give *Muscle Beach*

*Party* the right sound. While the movie's instrumental score was written by Les Baxter, experimental composer/arranger and another of one of Capitol's recording artists, six of the movie's original songs ("Muscle Beach Party," "Surfer's Holiday," "My First Love," "Runnin' Wild," "Muscle Bustle," and "My Surfin' Woodie") were penned and produced by Beach Boy Brian Wilson in collaboration with friends Gary Usher and Roger Christian, two other aspiring L.A.-based songwriters. One of these songs, "Muscle Bustle," featured in the movie as a duet performed by pop singer Donna Loren and Dick Dale himself.

Unlike their non-soundtrack work, Dale and Wilson's recordings weren't intended to sell independently of the movie itself, despite the fact that AIP housed its own record label division—American International Records—and owned the music publishing rights. The label lacked the resources of bigger labels and consisted essentially of AIP's movie music supervisor, Al Simms, who handled their recordings mainly as publicity for the movies in which they appeared. Sending promotional copies to DJ friends and acquaintances in the business, Simms was able to advance the music as a carrier of information. For a group of figures like Dale and the songwriting team of Wilson, Usher, Christian, it was important that, even if their recordings weren't marketed independently of the movie, their collective pop currency gained associative value. Simms later explained how a movie like *Muscle Beach Party* represented a unique opportunity for these musicians: "I [. . .] gave the Beach Boys their first chance to put a song in our picture, and Brian Wilson has never forgotten that" (quoted in McParland 2001b, 78). Such thinking squared with AIP's underdog spirit, using its individualism—in contrast to the power of larger Hollywood movie companies—as motivation to forge paths into the pop marketplace.

The reach of this marketplace also extended through the medium of television, which had the capacity to place these pop figures directly into the homes of their audience. The success of AIP's *Beach Party* movies established an accessible framework for a localized California sensibility, inclusive of story and music. But in a movie like *Muscle Beach Party*, songs like "Muscle Bustle" work mainly as accessories to the action, neither impeding the plot nor moving it forward; they just

happen. Though they contribute entertainment value, their aesthetic outlook can be somewhat stilted by awkward placement. The television entertainment format, however, enabled pop performers to address wide audiences more clearly within a different set of parameters.

The best example of this was *American Bandstand*. As an emphatically teen-oriented dance show, *American Bandstand* projected a clear attitude toward current pop music records and allowed performance itself to drive the action. The show's host, Dick Clark, was an entrepreneur who jostled his way through radio before becoming the face of *Bandstand* in 1956, taking over for the show's former host—the older, slightly stodgy Bob Horn—about one year before the local Philadelphia production was picked by the ABC network for national broadcast. From the beginning, the format of *American Bandstand* was centered on the idea that teenagers enjoyed watching other teenagers like themselves dance to the latest pop records and talking about why they liked them.

When the show began in 1952, rock 'n' roll hadn't yet conquered this demographic. Early *Bandstand* charts consisted of “sweet pop music” by adult performers like Nat King Cole, Peggy Lee, and Frankie Laine (Shore and Clark 1985, 5). The local Philadelphia high school students who made the after-school dash to the television studio hoping to appear on air also established among themselves a set of style codes for clothes, hairstyles as well as dances. As a symbol of adult comportment, Clark stood apart from his predecessor. Where Horn had a reputation for condescending to the in-studio teenagers both on and off camera, Clark found ways to champion the sensibilities of the show's studio regulars and home viewers. With a businessman's curiosity, Clark actively sought the latest records and developing pop trends that translated well on screen. He and producer Tommy Mammarella handpicked the records to be spun on the air after listening to them and consulting with each other, sometimes against their own personal tastes. With Clark at the wheel, the show became the American teenager's hub of information about current pop records and a manual for the latest dance moves.

A central principle of the *American Bandstand* format was that it avoided time lag and ambivalence in the circulation of content within the economy of pop. This was best illustrated by the show's “Rate-a-Record” segment in which individual

members of the in-studio audience were given the opportunity to speak into Clark's microphone on the air, explaining what they found appealing or unappealing about a particular tune. Over the first few years of national broadcast, Clark and the show's producers developed a highly astute system of pop meritocracy in which earning the respect of a wide teenage public constituted its own form of success, representing the very antithesis of mediocrity. To appear on *American Bandstand* during this period, either in person or in the form of a record, was to be recognized as a serious contender for pop achievement. As Frankie Avalon later explained it, decisiveness was the aim: "Dick Clark ran a tight ship. People thought I got on *Bandstand* just because I was a kid from Philadelphia. But I had made several records that flopped, that didn't get me on the show, before I finally did make it. You had to make a chart somewhere, or get a letter of request for whatever reason, to be eligible to get on the show. They didn't want to just plug ringers" (quoted in *Ibid.*, 29). As *American Bandstand* gained leverage within the pop industry, it also served as a platform for a number of performers. Either enhancing their previous success or gaining them a new teenage following, Avalon and his Beach Party movie co-star, Annette Funicello, and other teen idol performers like Fabian, Bobby Rydell, Paul Anka, and Bobby Darin benefited from appearing on the show.

By the time *Muscle Beach Party* was released in the spring of 1964, *American Bandstand* had already exposed its audience to the surf records coming from California. Both the Frogmen and Dick Dale and His Del-Tones made appearances on the show to promote their hit surf records ("Underwater" and "Let's Go Trippin'", respectively) in 1961. After the show relocated its production from Philadelphia to Hollywood in February of 1964, the Beach Boys made their first and only appearance just days after the release of *Muscle Beach Party*.

What a television show like *Bandstand* did that a movie like *Muscle Beach Party* didn't do was to take the attitude behind the records and place it at the center of public performance. It focused the experience of the music itself and, in doing so, took on a different set of possibilities and risks. Unlike the movie-going experience, which confined audiences to an enclosed space, television had the potential to bring emerging performers and new records to the attention of an audience limited only by the nearest picture tube with decent reception. By forging connections across large

geographic distances, it reduced the lag between the moment when a new pop idea or style emerged in one region and the moment it became available to a larger public. In this sense, it widened the circulation of images and sounds and set up a larger playing field for performance. Yet it couldn't be taken for granted that what was successful in California, for example, would automatically succeed in the state of New York. To be a good player in this open pop field was to find a balance between democratic appeal and the retention of a clear pop voice.

The most fortuitous convergence of Southern California sensibility with the limits of performance occurred with the production of a pop concert experiment in Santa Monica, California in late 1964. The *Los Angeles Times* announced in October that a company called Electronovision, Inc. was developing a major project, "an original teen-age music show tentatively titled 'Teen-Age Command Performance.'" The report stated that the 100-minute show would be filmed at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium over two days, October 27, 28, in time for a wide, Christmas holiday release, and "Among the artists already signed are The Beach Boys, Lesley Gore, The Rolling Stones, Marvin Gaye and Jan and Dean" (October 14, 1964). Just several days after the show was filmed, Electronovision's president and executive producer of the project, H.W. (Bill) Sargeant, gave an interview to the *Los Angeles Times* in which he explained how the teen music show was a fitting candidate to demonstrate his company's cutting technology, a way of capturing film footage on video but with film stock quality.

Sargeant was an ambitious electronics engineer who had already developed a television subscription-viewing concept which could accommodate closed-circuit broadcasts to movie theaters. Electronovision was the name given to the high-resolution video cameras Sargeant developed with another electronics engineer named Joseph Bluth. The technology was designed especially with television and film possibilities in mind.<sup>7</sup> He explained it as an expedient process that incorporated

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<sup>7</sup> Sargeant envisioned a business model where movies made in this manner could not only make a profit from effectively-planned, very-limited runs, but could also take on grand Hollywood productions for achievement awards. The proposition, as the title of the article—"Hollywood's Newest Threat"—and Sargeant himself suggested, was that this process could lead to a change in Academy horse-and-buggy policy from the 1930s, which required a

“the technology of TV with the philosophies of the film in a totally new concept” (Ibid.).

The idea to put on a grand pop music show, however, had been conceived by a separate organization called Teenage Awards Music International (T.A.M.I.). The purpose of the international organization was to produce a series of annual concerts and awards shows showcasing current rock ‘n’ roll performers. The proceedings were to be nationally televised and a portion of the earnings was to be directed by the nonprofit organization towards international youth music programs and scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Electronovision’s stake in the project wasn’t just to provide T.A.M.I. with the resources to pull off the filming of the show in two days but to have a studio quality movie ready for screening “in 35 branch film exchanges—via closed circuit—the day after we shot it” (Ibid.).

T.A.M.I. conceived the music show as the first of an ongoing annual event to promote pop music in a way that, if not entirely innovative, corresponded well with *Bandstand* style pluralism, taking it a step further. Teens who attended the movie during its limited theater run were entitled to a punch “IBM ballot” along with their ticket purchase and encouraged to vote for their favorite performers from the show. Winners of the vote were to be gathered together for the awards telecast the following March. *The T.A.M.I. Show* is probably the most salient example of L.A.-based industry achievement in the context of a mass mediated teen-oriented pop culture of this period. Similar Los Angeles-based television shows in this period included *Where The Action Is*, *Shindig!*, *Hullabaloo*, and *American Bandstand* itself, which moved the West Coast in early 1964. After two weeks of post-production and planning, the movie was released in mid-November. Including production and advertising, the production reportedly cost approximately \$1,400,000 (Waller 2010). Fittingly, American International Pictures agreed to distribute *The T.A.M.I. Show* nationally; in some locations, it trumped the records set by previously by *Beach Party*.

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picture to run in a Los Angeles theater for at least seven days in order to be eligible for an Academy Award.

<sup>8</sup> According to the liner notes of the 2010 DVD release of *The T.A.M.I. Show*, “None of these things [i.e., the charitable contributions to music programs and scholarship] ever took place” (Waller 2010, 10).

*The T.A.M.I. Show* documents a remarkable cultural moment that successfully fused *Bandstand*'s democratic "Rate-a-Record" ethos with technological capacity to vivify image and sound into a feat of pop industry. Pooled together under the musical direction of producer Phil Spector's stalwart studio arranger Jack Nitzsche, the show's stage band consisted of many well-know L.A. session players. These musicians went through two days of rehearsals along with the lineup of performers, including the Beach Boys, Chuck Berry, The Barbarians, Billy J. Kramer & The Dakotas, Gerry & The Pacemakers, Lesley Gore, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson & The Miracles, The Rolling Stones, and James Brown & The Flames. A special opening sequence, constructed by director Steve Binder, was set to a song—"(Here They Come) From All Over The World"—recorded especially for the movie by the show's two hosts, pop duo Jan and Dean. The sequence combines footage of the dancers' rehearsals with footage of the performers arriving at Los Angeles International Airport, driving through the city, and dressing for the show. Apart from the remarkable quality of the performances themselves, the event itself conveys a high degree of industry professionalism and a clear synchronicity between a wide spectrum of prime pop performers—from golden era rock 'n' roll to surf, Motown and girl group singers to the British invaders—and the audience. Also telling is the manner in which the current of pop music meritocracy in this performance context appears to bypass relevant questions of racial division. The Civil Rights Act, which terminated legal public segregation of blacks and non-blacks in the United States, was passed by Congress only several months before production on *T.A.M.I.* began. Perhaps not coincidentally, Bill Sargeant and director Steve Binder had produced segments for a May 1964 televised commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's declaration in the case of "Brown v. Board of Education" that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (Waller 2010).<sup>9</sup> The continuous hollering of 3,000 teenagers is matched only by a continuous flashing of smiles from

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<sup>9</sup> In terms of a larger picture of rock history, it is interesting to contrast *T.A.M.I.* with later, well-known summits such as the Monterey International Pop Festival of 1967 in Monterey, California, the August 1969 Woodstock Music and Arts Fair in Bethel, New York, and the Altamont Speedway free concert in Northern California in December 1969. Where *T.A.M.I.* bridges racial division under the banner of pop music, these later events seem to increasingly distance themselves from black-identified pop music styles and performers of their time.

the performers on stage. The entire production is informed by elements of ambition and quality that are difficult to explain according to an essentialist art versus commerce dichotomy.

The Beach Boys' appearance in *The T.A.M.I. Show* marked a kind of pop apogee in which their sound and image effectively breached the limits of geography to become the shared stuff of a massed, interconnected American public. By this point in late 1964, the sensibility they represented—a rich style comprised of surf, fun, California itself—had taken hold not just on the merit of localized success or aesthetic content, but through the observable achievements of its figures. Typically young, these figures developed a set of sounds, gestures, and vocabulary into a commercial proposition that a wider industry could not have predicted or could afford to ignore. And as much as the sounds and images of surf needed the industry to sustain them, it was the spending decisions of young people the industry was following. In a sense, both audience and performer had managed to commandeer the resources of pop industry to take their music as far as it might conceivably go.

By the end of 1964, program listings for two Los Angeles FM radio stations—KMLA (100.3) and KGLA (103.5)—were highlighting the regular broadcast of an album called *The Beach Boys Song Book: Romantic Instrumentals by The Hollyridge Strings*. The album consists of eleven Beach Boys originals mawkishly arranged for a multi-piece studio orchestra. This kind of easy listening pop certainly wasn't the first of its kind to be released by Capitol. The company had already successfully developed the mood album format most conspicuously with Nelson Riddle and Frank Sinatra, but *The Beach Boys Song Book* was one of the company's first attempts to transpose what was a resolutely teen-oriented genre into an adult pop sound. By 1960, the album's arranger Stu Phillips had already recorded a series of deluxe orchestral mood albums for Capitol, but this one arrived on the heels of the Hollyridge Strings' successful debut project, *The Beatles Song Book*. In

the case of both albums, the company appears to have sought opposing consumer categories through a mongrelized pop sound.<sup>10</sup>

There are two ways to think about the concept behind *The Beach Boys Song Book*. In one sense, we can cast Capitol Records in the role of a mad scientist and the Beach Boys' music the pure, organic matter used to create an unpredictable and impetuous monster. The music doesn't follow a natural pattern of issuance as much as it metastasizes to the point where it becomes an intractable public presence. According to this reading, the easy listening versions are heard as lesser versions according to the manner of their acquaintance. In fact, this question of authenticity goes back to the beginning of the Beach Boys' rise to popularity, when some of their peers initially saw them as suburban tourists who misrepresented the life of the real California surfer. Sixteen-year-old Belairs guitarist, Paul Johnson, whose song "Mr. Moto" competed with Dale's "Let's Go Trippin'" for chart ranking during that time, noticed what was happening:

Naturally this was a hot topic around the beach and at school for awhile; the word was that a bunch of guys from Hawthorne had recorded this tune ["Surfin'"], and put it out as "The Beach Boys." No one had ever seen these guys around any of the beaches. [. . .] There was a sense of outrage that the image of surfing would be devalued. Over the next few weeks, it became quite apparent that The Beach Boys' idea had worked; to thousands of kids just catching on to the surfing "fad," ["Surfin'"] was the greatest thing since hula-hoops! This made it all the more a touchy subject around the beach, however; I can even recall some of those who were fanatically devoted to keeping the surf scene "unadulterated" threatening to go and beat up The Beach Boys! (quoted in McParland 2001b, 36)

In spite of their moniker, brother Dennis Wilson was the only member of the Beach Boys who actually surfed. But to chide the group for not reflecting authentic surf culture is like chiding Miki Dora for appearing in movies without being a trained Shakespearean actor. It misses a core principle of pop, which is accessibility. Similarly, the *Song Book* treatment of the Beach Boys isn't so much a dilution of quality as it is an example of the way style travels freely as public currency. There is little doubt about the extent to which the pop surf phenomenon penetrated public consciousness. One of the most amusing accounts of the way surf music permeated

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<sup>10</sup> Similar ones followed, including an Elvis Presley collection in 1965, a second volume of Beach Boys songs in 1967, and several more Beatles volumes through 1968 (<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/the-hollyridge-strings-p25231/discography>).

just about any aspect of Southern California culture is a *Los Angeles Times* story from 1965, describing the science experiment of two Santa Monica junior high school students. After running a ten-week biological study to determine the effects of different genres of music on the growth of carnations and dwarf zinnia flowers, fifteen year-old Kirk Wilson and Gary Bennett, had collected telling data. In contrast to the group of flowers exposed to “gentle island rhythms” which showed no measurable difference in growth compared to the control group exposed to no recorded music, the flowers treated with the “high, piercing falsetto sound” of Jan and Dean and the Beach Boys had grown an average of half an inch larger. The article concludes with this flippant commentary: “The results of the study should be of interest not only to botanists but also to rock ‘n’ roll adherents cowed by criticism from the Lawrence Welk set.” Misguided or not, these junior high school students were using science to demonstrate the significance of surf music.

For the Beach Boys, the attainment of mass success entailed a risk of over-familiarization that made the music susceptible to cliché. The nature of this expansion showed that the limits of surf as category of pop music were influenced more by the passage of time than by ideal form. It was the Beach Boys’ roles as emissaries for a Southern California sensibility that granted them access to the pop mainstream; yet access alone seemed pointless unless it could also be used as a means to play with shared sensibilities.

## Chapter Two: The Pop Miseducation of Brian Wilson

There have been great American artists who have worked beyond the public's ability to understand them easily, but none who have condescended to the public[.] This is a democratic desire (not completely unrelated to the all-time number one democratic desire for wealth and fame), and at its best it is an impulse to wholeness, an attempt not to deny diversity or to hide from it, but to discover what it is that diverse people can authentically share. It is a desire of the artist to remake America on his or her own terms.

--Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train*, 1975

In the beginning Brian Wilson wasn't that different from any other gauche suburban kid playing out his rock 'n' roll fantasies in the comfort of the family home, even though it was more in hope than expectation.

--Rob Finnis, rock writer, 2002

In the spring of 1964, the Beach Boys recorded an album called *All Summer Long*. Where the group's earlier LPs were more conspicuously organized by the surfing and hot rod trends that Capitol flogged with such efficiency, this one upturned expectations about direct marketability. The album was released in July—appropriately, the same month when America celebrates Independence Day, perhaps the only American holiday that can evoke as much noncommittal sentiment as flag-waving conceit, often in the same person. Yet the music on *All Summer Long* didn't equivocate. Rather than drying up in blithe, automatic fun-in-the-sun clichés, it fleshed them out, coherently, according to the LP format, complete with a modernist style cover featuring various photos of the band at Malibu in various compositions of a beach party scenario.<sup>1</sup> Especially on songs such as “I Get Around,” “Girls On The Beach,” “Little Honda,” and “All Summer Long,” the group surpassed the simplicity of their earlier records by presenting the life of the Southern California teenager from a unified perspective, in a way that made it seem like an adjunct to the music, not the other way around.

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<sup>1</sup> For interesting discussions of the aesthetic principles behind the artwork for *All Summer Long*, see Keightley 1991 and Priore 2005.

The rest of the year—a year that also saw the stateside arrival of the Beatles—when not in the recording studio, the Beach Boys were busy taking their music everywhere, publicly solidifying their alliance as a band. They embarked on concert tours across the U.S. and abroad, performed on popular television programs like *American Bandstand* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and appeared in *The T.A.M.I Show* concert production. They even recorded a theme song<sup>2</sup> for the short-lived NBC show *Karen*, a sitcom about the adventures of a sixteen-year-old SoCal girl and her teenage friends. In the middle of all this promotion, *All Summer Long* played to a wide audience like an impelling list of instructions for learning Southern California attitude. It was also the last Beach Boys album to successfully project an image of the group as a self-contained musical unit.

The period when the Beach Boys rose beyond the confines of the Hawthorne suburbs and entered the ranks of a pop music vanguard is as significant for the improbability of their climb as it is for their success. Their foray into the industry wasn't filled by the kind of nomadic hustle that brought individuals like Dick Dale or Nick Venet from the east coast to the business of making records in Los Angeles.

Venet once described his expectations in terms of irreverence, not faith: "I wanted to do something devastating; I wanted to behave as I liked without going to jail; I wanted to do something dishonest—but legal." (Quoted in Finnis 2002, 5) At 21, Venet was among the youngest staff producers/A&R men at Capitol when he secured a position there in 1960. That people as young as Venet were finding their way to administrative positions at Southern California record companies like Capitol in the early 1960s marked an important shift in conventional business practice; within the L.A. record industry, boundaries between professional and creative roles were beginning to blur. For many young musicians and aspiring producers, including the Beach Boys, the recording studio presented itself more as the setting for rites of

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<sup>2</sup> Though the Beach Boys performed it, the *Karen* theme song was actually written by Capitol Records producer Jack Marshall, who also wrote the theme song for the sitcom *The Munsters*, along with lyricist Bob Mosher. Focusing on the life of one Southern California teenager, the concept of *Karen* was clearly modeled after the Gidget character from Frederick Kohner's novel and the popular movie series. The show was part of a 90-minute block of Monday night programming called *90 Bristol Court*, which included two other shows whose stories were set at the same fictional Southern California apartment complex.

passage than a deliberate career choice. The business of making records and getting them heard entailed an ethos of conquest, but the expectation was often no more than that. From the perspective of the industry's old guard, guys like Venet were seen as nuisances. Two years after Venet entered Capitol, the company's vice president, Voyle Gilmore, grumbled to *Billboard* magazine about the influx of younger A&R men into the industry; his biggest peeve seemed to be that they claimed creative proprietorship for hit recordings without first treading the traditional path to the position of record producer and that they lacked basic knowledge of engineering technology (January 4, 1964). At approximately this same time, Venet left Capitol to form an independent label called Ben-Ven Productions. A few years later, in an October 1971 *Rolling Stone* interview, he sarcastically remarked to journalist Tom Nolan on the generational tension he experienced when he first joined Capitol, saying he was "the only one under 65."<sup>3</sup>

Despite this evident tension within the industry, and with more ease than some of their contemporaries—Dick Dale, for example—the Beach Boys surpassed the stage of cutting a couple of singles, maybe an album, and hopefully grabbing some money. Through the height of the surf and hot rod trends (1961 through early 1964), Capitol released five LPs and seven singles by the Beach Boys. In the process, the group entered the flow of the pop mainstream and became their own brand of music; their name and sound were synonymous with Southern California youth attitude. *All Summer Long* marked the peak of this period.

From the beginning, though, the Beach Boys were a complicated group. Their image and sound cohered partly at the level of kinship (most clearly in the blending of their vocal harmonies) and partly by a sense that, being from the place they sang about, the records weren't entirely a commercial put-on. The things they sang about—the beach, Pacific Ocean Park, taking dad's car, drive-in movies—weren't things they had to go elsewhere to learn because they were a part of their everyday experience. But instead of agitating or rebelling against it, the music sought to celebrate the affluent, suburban culture that produced it. It was also important that the Beach Boys' path to success bypassed the traditionally lengthy period of due-paying,

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough cataloguing of these fledgling young hucksters in the early 1960s Los Angeles recording industry, see Hoskyns 2003.

usually determined by the honing of performance style in front of finicky, adversarial audiences and/or groping for record label interest. Capitol signed the group no later than six months after they recorded their first tune. For the Beach Boys, the question of corporate sell-out is beside the point because it never really seemed like an option. That they thrived as a musically self-sufficient group not despite the surf pop trend, but in conjunction with it, disrupts the logic of conventionalization that suggests musical vitality should be lost through mass-mediation (Jarrett 1992).

If *All Summer Long* can be seen as the effective melding of the Beach Boys' musical integrity with mainstream success, my argument here is that the conventional art versus commerce dichotomy fails to adequately explain Brian's wresting of creative autonomy that began well before the album's release and continued after it. In his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, titled "Reconsidering Rock," Keir Keightley argues that behind rock's historical pursuit of authentic individualism, "What is truly at stake in rock culture is the differentiation of taste, not affiliation with forms of cultural action" (2001, 129). Part of what makes the Beach Boys such an odd group, from a rock history perspective, is that they emerged as a part of the teen-oriented rank of pop music in a period when affiliation with such forms of cultural action seemed less like a criterion for musical significance than a hindrance to its purported gimcrack value (Garofalo 2002). Rock 'n' roll's rabble-rousing heyday was over, and the aesthetic potential of the album format was just beginning to be taken seriously by musicians in non-adult market categories.

Critic Mark Sten defines this as an "in-between" period, a chapter in rock history when highly crafted—as opposed to individually expressive—pop style and aesthetic form played out publicly with perhaps fewer high-minded encumbrances (1978). In the case of the Beach Boys, the differentiation of taste—concern for one aesthetic sensibility or another—asserted itself not in opposition to the mainstream but through the commandeering of familiar pop forms. At the center of their stylistic expectations, Brian Wilson—primary songwriter and producer of the group's recordings—sought a creative proprietorship in which tapping the mainstream didn't necessarily entail a musical dead end.

From 1962 through 1964, Brian navigated between his Beach Boys obligations and numerous other recording projects in the capacity of both songwriter

and producer. But rather than eluding or committing to one side of a market or genre division, these endeavors worked within the incongruities that separated them. Whether applying expanded production techniques to a proven lyrical theme, or reworking older pop tunes in an experimental production style, the music of this period reflected efforts to gain fluency in a variety of pop music vocabularies. Instead of etching a pocket of inviolable sounds within mass sensibility, he treated wide appeal as something that could be reworked—bent, internalized—to fit within a framework of personal musical interest and authorship. It was through this pursuit of a shared pop language that Brian Wilson, paradoxically, gained creative proprietorship of the Beach Boys' music.

By the time the group had released their first LP, *Surfin' Safari*, Brian's stake in the Los Angeles studio scene was already determined by separate but mutually constitutive creative endeavors, many of them including non-Beach Boys collaborators. The first of these involved friend Gary Usher, a Hollywood bank teller who had been fumbling his way through Los Angeles recording studios with songwriting and performing aspirations for a while before he met Brian. The two formed a musical partnership just before the Beach Boys signed to Capitol in January 1962, and this was important for several reasons. In one sense, Gary complemented Brian's lack of industry experience simply because he had been maneuvering through the Los Angeles scene for a slightly longer period of time. As he remembered, "[Brian] never (at least at that stage) thought in business terms, and when I met him, this was a side of him I tried to change. I attempted to educate him in areas like this, to look out a little more for his own interests [. . .] but at the same time trying not to put shackles on him" (quoted in McParland 2001a, 65). In another sense, Gary offered Brian a complementary set of ears for testing out songwriting and studio production ideas.

Together, the pair recorded their first set of songs at Western Recorders, a place already familiar to Gary, in April 1962. One of them, "409," wound up as the b-side to the Beach Boys' first Capitol single, "Surfin' Safari." It was at Western where the Beach Boys first recorded with Chuck Britz, the engineer who went on to become one of Brian's trusted studio facilitators. More importantly, it was during this

early collaborative sprint with Gary when Brian first gained admittance to resources that enabled him to move into the position of a studio producer. Master recordings of several more songs co-written by Brian and Gary—“My Only Alibi,” “Visions,” “Beginning Of The End,” and “One Way Road To Love”—were recorded but never released.

Emboldened by what they could pull off, the pair maneuvered to break the charts with another kind of independent production just weeks before the *Surfin’ Safari* album was released. Their inspiration came from a recent hit written by Gerry Goffin and Carole King and performed by a singer called Little Eva, a dance record called “The Loco-Motion.” Searching for a singer who could best Eva at the microphone, they specified a similar female black sound. In the end, they chose a girl named Carolyn Willis, just one among the many young session vocalists making their way through L.A. studios. Following the tradition of the response record—the practice of making a record that, to varying degrees of obviousness, refers itself to a previous hit, in search of success by association—they titled the tune “The Revolution” (“It beats the mashed potato, the loco-motion, the twist!,” goes one line [1962] 2003) and named the project Rachel & The Revolvers. After networking with some of Gary’s industry contacts, they released “The Revo-Lution”—backed with another Usher, Wilson original, a ballad called “Number One”—independently on the Dot label. There is an unforced earnestness about “The Revo-Lution.” The record’s attempt to imitate the beat of “The Loco-Motion” sounds not quite literalist, not really arch. What comes through Brian’s production of Willis’s performance is a clear taste for her tinny vocal quality, the way it rides the beat without losing ground to the honking sax.

Similar experimentation happened with Sharon Marie, a solo singer Brian used as a vehicle for integrating another kind of vocal texture into rich studio production. Of the two Sharon Marie singles he produced, the more interesting was the one that put “Run-Around Lover,” a thumping dance tune Brian wrote with fellow Beach Boy, Mike Love, against a version of George Gershwin’s “Summertime” that rearranged the popular jazz standard around a slinky bass line groove and Marie’s sultry vocal ([1963] 2003). Where “Run-Around Lover” double tracks Marie’s voice to bouncy girl group effect, Marie elongates her voice in

“Summertime” with sexy, spectral intonations. These singles never made their way past sporadic radio airplay, but they were clear indications of a developing practice that found Brian reworking his admiration for particular studio techniques and styles into an identifiably ‘Brian Wilson’ sound.

While the creative path of these projects ran mostly parallel to the early surf pop path of the Beach Boys, at times, they also converged. Following the Rachel & The Revolvers project, Brian collaborated with then roommate and friend Bob Norberg and Norberg’s girlfriend, Cheryl Pomeroy, on an independent single aimed at the surf market. Brian and Bob wrote a ballad called “The Surfer Moon,” which Brian produced along with one of Bob’s originals called “Humpty Dumpty.” They released them as a single under the name Bob & Sheri on a label especially set up at the Wilson family’s Hawthorne address. Like “The Revolution,” the single didn’t make an impression on the charts until a reworked version of the “The Surfer Moon” appeared on the Beach Boys’ *Surfer Girl* album one year later. Significantly, it was on this version that Brian introduced a noticeably different sound palette into a Beach Boys context by using a group of session musicians to accommodate his original string arrangement.

More experimentation came when Brian began stewarding production for a girl group and another established pop duo. The Honeys were a girl group brought to his attention by Gary Usher. Not unlike the Beach Boys family-oriented unit, the Honeys were a young vocal trio signed to Capitol, comprised of two sisters, Marilyn and Diane Rovell, and their cousin, Ginger Blake. As a group of female singers they didn’t strike the obvious surfer image, but Brian his production of their records as a way to work through ideas alternative to what he was doing on Beach Boys surf records. The Honeys’ first single consisted of an original song called “Shoot the Curl,” written by the girls themselves, and a version of Stephen Foster’s “Swanee River,” reinterpreted by Brian as “Surfin’ Down the Swanee River.” If nothing else, “Shoot the Curl” provided a fair counterpoint to the male-dominated surf music scene. The decision to apply current surf styles to a dated, rather un-rock ‘n’ roll, Stephen Foster song, however, stood apart as an odd display of Brian’s nerdy musical interests.

Of all the non-Beach Boys projects Brian touched, it was his association with the pop vocal duo Jan and Dean that earned them and him a big cut of the surf record market. Jan and Dean were making records before the rise of the Beach Boys and had some fair success with a funny tune called “Baby Talk”; but it wasn’t until they recast their image in 1963, recording versions of “Surfin’” and “Surfin’ Safari” along with a new song called “Surf City” (co-written and produced by Brian, who also sings on the record) for an album titled *Jan and Dean Take Linda Surfin’*, that the duo became like Brian’s beneficiaries. Following this, they had a good run in the marketplace riding the coattails of the surf music trend, sounding like a slightly amped-up version of the Beach Boys.

The most interesting aspect of these independent recording projects isn’t just that they reflected a general lack of street smarts or business sense, but that the music itself conveyed an unlikely pop sensibility, difficult to define but central to Brian’s creative development. In tunes like “The Revo-Lution,” “Summertime,” and “Surf City,” Brian played with the idea of imitation, pulling a personal taste for certain kinds of pop songs, voices, and performance into the crafting of his own music. Here, arbitration of style and talent combines with creative intention, muddling the distinction between sociological notions of consumption and production. What makes this unusual was that instead of evading conventional pop sentiment for rock ‘n’ roll snarl, Brian’s sensibility reveled in the liminal area between cool restraint and mawkishness. The best example of this was “Be True To Your School,” a tune that first appeared on the Beach Boys’ fourth album, *Little Deuce Coupe*, but which Brian reworked for release as a single by amping it up as a high school football pep rally chant, complete with marching band-style arrangement that also cast the Honeys as cheerleaders ([1963] 2001). Years later, former Beach Boy member, David Marks, remarked on these aesthetic inclinations: “You listen to those first albums today, and they sound campy, corny, but Brian was dead serious. [. . .] It wasn’t like Brian was trying to put something over. ‘Is this commercial? How are we going to trick these turkeys into buying this?’ There was no formulating or plotting or planning” (Quoted in McParland 2001a, 60). Rather than detaching from it, these productions gravitated toward a familiar brand mainstream American culture, yet they increasingly adapted, in musical terms, to Brian’s individual interpretation of pop aesthetic conventions.

The scale of these early independent projects was generally modest, but Brian learned much more about the possibilities of big production from the rise of a fellow producer named Phil Spector. Though he had scored a hit back in 1958 with the Teddy Bears, a high school band he formed to record an original song called, “To Know Him Is To Love Him,” Spector was neither a natural performer nor a consistently strong enough songwriter to work autonomously. Originally from the Bronx borough of New York City, he migrated with his mother to Los Angeles first as a teenager. During a post-high school bout of self-discovery, he forged a path into the recording industry, along the way assembling an arsenal of pop music knowledge. He first worked under the tutelage of producer Duane Eddy at the former’s Arizona studios before taking a freelance gig in New York City in an arrangement with songwriters/producers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who showed him the ins and outs of their particular studio craft. Working in a manner both ingratiating and brusque, it was during his time with Lieber and Stoller that Spector discovered his own talent for studio production. By 1961, he, along with associate Lester Sill, had formed an independent label called Philles Records. Under the label’s banner, Spector built a mean reputation as both a studio producer and a business shark. After one year together, Spector bought out Sill, bringing Philles under his sole authority.

Real notoriety came in 1964, when the *New York Herald Tribune* published an article devoted solely to Spector’s achievements titled, “The First of Tycoon of Teen,” written by rising journalist Tom Wolfe. Accounting for the paradoxical stance he assumed in relation to seemingly-opposing roles of studio producer and industry professional, Wolfe, with a sort of backhanded flattery, cast Spector as a kind of cultural non-sequitur: “A Teenage Tycoon! It is too wacked out. He is betwixt and between. He identifies with the teenage netherworld, he defends it, but he is already too mature for it” (68). Where Wolfe described him as a twenty-three-year-old eccentric/millionaire/pop hit-maker, curiously accomplished for his age, he was also a guy with a vague “beatnik” style (Ibid.). Neither ironic nor pejorative, but containing shades of both, the use of the word “beatnik” is significant here. By 1964, countercultural lifestyle and attitude, which had been bubbling at the fringes of

society for arguably two decades, had converged with square, mainstream America mainly as caricature. In 1959, *Life* magazine published two notable articles—one titled “Squaresville U.S.A. vs. Beatsville” (September 21) and another titled “The Only Rebellion Around: but the shabby beats bungle the job in arguing, sulking and bad poetry” (November 30)—that downplayed the complex meanings behind so-called ‘beatnik’ slang and gestures while emphasizing their appeal to the typical suburban teenager. From 1959 to 1963, the popular CBS television program, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, followed the adventures of a heartland teenager named Dobie Gillis and his unemployed, goateed, bebop-touting, hipster slang-dropping, beatnik wingman, Maynard G. Krebs. Though some of the finer aspects of countercultural meaning and intention were lost in this stereotyping, it cannot be taken for granted that nothing was gained in the process of mass mediation. It was exposure like this that nevertheless brought counterculture ideas directly into the homes of Middle Americans who were otherwise unlikely to pay attention. By making the beatnik cultural reference, Wolfe was playing up familiar insider/outsider rhetoric.<sup>4</sup>

His observations are significant for several reasons. Wolfe recognized Spector for synthesizing traditionally separate roles (the creative thinker and the businessman), which in turn implied a shift in expectations about a pop song’s relationship to the recording process. Arbitrated by an identifiable, yet unseen, personality, the music becomes directly associated with the studio producer as much as with the performer/s, if not more. But it was the unlikeliness of Spector’s musical interests—Top-40 teen pop—that Wolfe really played up: “Anyway, Phil Spector likes this music. He genuinely likes it. He is not a short-armed fatty hustling nutball fads” (65). Like in Brian Wilson’s music, the gap between production and consumption is narrowed to form a widely reaching, yet personal, pop aesthetic.

Wolfe subtly flattered Spector by playing up the aura of boy-wonder impresario, but he also drew attention to shared contemporary assumptions about musical taste and ethical aesthetic judgment, begging questions about why such music should have resonated with him or his audience. Years later, Spector confessed

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<sup>4</sup> For some valuable insight into the basic dynamics of this cultural convergence as it happened in Southern California, see Chidester 2008, Lipton 1959, Maynard 1991, and Wolfe 1968.

that he saw himself as the rightful heir to what he thought was a waning rock ‘n’ roll cause: “Because if I didn’t make anything that was better, I might as well have left it to Fats Domino, because he did it all by himself. [. . .] What need was there for Phil Spector to come along and make his records unless they were going to be a contribution and really could do something more?” (quoted in Williams 2002, 77, 78) What made Spector such a curiosity was his staunch (professional and personal) commitment to a kind of entertainment music thought to be little more than a passing fad. By working within the tradition of professional songwriting yet treating image singers and the recording studio as vehicles for creative expression, he breached the pervading industry thought that said it wasn’t the business of industry executives to worry about advancing a personal musical point of view (Gillett 1970, 292).

Spector was pop conceptualist. He treated the monaural 45-rpm single as the preeminent pop format, conceiving his productions specifically for the brevity of the a-side. To ensure they got the most radio play possible, Spector-produced singles were often backed with throwaway cuts—session outtakes of musicians jamming without any vocal tracks, for example. His success came with a series of early-1960s hits with a variety of well-stylized male and female pop singers, but mainly with a cadre of girl groups. Applying his production to tunes written by Brill Building songsmiths like Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, Spector turned the Crystals’ “Then He Kissed Me” and “Da Doo Run Run,” and the Ronettes’ “Be My Baby,” for example, into teen anthems. It was the big, identifiably Phil Spector sound of these records that set him apart as Brian’s own studio totem, as he later explained it:

I was unable to really think as a producer up until the time where I really got familiar with Phil Spector’s work. [. . .] Then I started to see the point of making records. You’re in the business to create a record. So you design the experience to be a record rather than just a song. It’s good to take a good song and work with it. But it’s the record that counts. It’s the record that people listen to. It’s the overall sound, what they’re going to hear and experience in two and a half minutes. (quoted in Leaf 1985, 73)

Central to the Spector sound experience is the idea of integration, the bringing together of social and aesthetic reference points into a solid pop music stance. He combined authorial intent with an inclusive Top-40 sensibility, yet he built up teen

melodrama with power and excess. The early-'60s analogue world both he and Brian occupied was dominated by four- and three-track tape recording systems, which meant creative license extended to basic overdubbing and some room to experiment with studio acoustics. Spector avoided subtlety, though, and typically used these techniques to make unmistakably overbearing sounds. "I always went in for that Wagnerian approach to rock and roll," he once explained it (quoted in Williams 2002 77). This grand sound experience began in the "uptown r 'n' b" (Gillet 1970) sensibilities of his New York mentors—a knowing, urban pulse, thickened by an all-or-nothing application of studio echo and reverb. Spector's innovation was to saturate the tape with a thick swirl of sounds and overdubs, but mix them in a way so that they rang, coherently, as if from a fully integrated, single channel.

More than this, the ethnic background of his cadre of singers and groups was noticeably diverse. Spector records don't assert themselves along the lines of a clear black/white dichotomy. For all the apparent lack of ethnic color in the image and sound of the Beach Boys, Brian was nevertheless in this period producing music in a similar mode, where success called for fluency in a range of sounds and production techniques rather than a purity of style. The music of both producers implied an aspect of pop currency that was far more associative than essentially black or white, teen or adult.

From a technological standpoint, the furious wall of sound that became Spector's trademark was achieved mainly under the particular conditions at Gold Star Recording Studios in Hollywood, with its four, specially designed echo chambers, where he also cultivated a stature of self-importance among collaborators and peers. Many of the session musicians Spector employed emerged from the dominating influence of the previous generation of Hollywood studio musicians. This older generation was rooted mostly in film score work, and their reputations were cultivated by a demeanor of high professionalism, anonymity, and a cool distance from the music they played in large studio orchestras. The younger session musicians drew mostly from the looser attitudes of a postwar generation (Blaine and Bonzai, 2003). By relying on a core group of players, Spector encouraged an ethos of group solidarity and a musical shorthand that in turn enabled a stylistic cohesion. Labeling themselves the "Wrecking Crew" as a reflection of their non-parochial attitudes and

embrace of individual style both as discrete players and as a collective, they constituted a malleable musical tool for Spector, providing a necessary foil for his presiding musical authority.

The issue of creative proprietorship is important here. It was no accident that as Brian was taking musical custodianship of projects like the Honeys, the Survivors, and Sharon Marie, he was also a first-hand observer and admirer of Spector at work in Gold Star. Just one among a coterie of friends and other insiders allowed access to recording sessions at the producer's behest, Brian was able to learn from Spector as Spector had learned from people like Eddy, Leiber, and Stoller. More than the stylistic emulation demonstrated by some of these side projects, it was the Beach Boys' 1964 song, "Don't Worry Baby," that not only reflected Brian's understanding of Spector's musical outlook on a record like the Ronettes' "Be My Baby," but that he could successfully adapt it to fit his own. This give and take of ideas and skills turned to active overture when Brian offered up one of his own songs—"Don't Hurt My Little Sister—for the wall of sound treatment. Brian pitched it as an opportunity for one of Spector's girl groups, and Spector entertained the idea, even recording and instrumental backing track (McParland 2001b, 76). Brian even participated in the recording, playing the piano part, but Spector never followed the idea through to completion. According to his frequently used arranger, Jack Nitzsche, the reason Spector didn't complete the production was because "he didn't share in it, the writing" (Quoted in McParland 2001, 76). Though their work indicated a mutually flattering stylistic continuity, Wilson and Spector handled ownership of ideas differently. "Don't Hurt My Little Sister" eventually appeared on the early-'65 Beach Boys album, *The Beach Boys Today!*, reworked to fit their vocal style.

The most important convergence of these two producers was their decision to take on the recording of Christmas music. Perhaps the most conventional type of pop sentiment available to them, Christmas music remains a cultural regularity that evokes as much social cohesion as personal indifference. It was an unlikely decision in the sense that this music had been successfully breached only once before, six years earlier, by an otherwise 'non-traditional' pop performer. In 1957, *Elvis' Christmas Album* spent four weeks at the number one spot on *Billboard's* Top Pop Album chart, remarkably upstaging the positions of procedural and returning

Christmas pop albums that year, including Pat Boone's . . . *and a very Merry Christmas To You* (number three) and Perry Como's *Perry Como Sings Merry Christmas Music* (number nine). Elvis's biggest feat, however, was in usurping the reign of pop vocal statesman—Mr. “White Christmas” himself—Bing Crosby, whose *Merry Christmas* album topped the Christmas charts every year since 1945.

Convinced he had something to contribute, Spector began work on a selection of Christmas songs in September 1963, producing them in his trademark style, but shifting the routine emphasis on vocal performance to all-or-nothing studio arrangements. The finished album, *A Christmas Gift For You From Philles Records*, was released on November 22, 1963. Though it failed to climb any higher than the number thirteen spot in *Billboard*,<sup>5</sup> the music on the album successfully conveys Christmas sentiment and represents Spector's deliberate move to test the social reach of his production style. As he expressed it in the liner notes—which also included a suitably gaudy photographic portrait of Spector, himself a Jewish boy with a birthday at Christmas time, in the tackiest of Santa Clause costumes, beady eyes peering over a pair of sunglasses—the point wasn't religious observance, but to participate in a shared vernacular: “Because Christmas is so American it is therefore time to take the great Christmas music and give it the sound of the American music of today—the sound of The Crystals, The Ronettes, Darlene Love, Bob B. Soxx and The Blue Jeans. [. . .] It comes from me to you with the sincere wish that you understand and appreciate this endeavor into something new and different for Christmas” ([1963] 1989). With all this earnestness, the album brought together thirteen familiar Christmas songs—“White Christmas,” “Frosty The Snowman,” “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Clause,” “Winter Wonderland,” “Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer,” for example—and one original Spector wrote in collaboration with Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, “Christmas (Baby Please Come Home).”

Brian was watching closely. He attended some of the *A Christmas Gift* sessions and was even reportedly remunerated for his piano-playing during recording of “Santa Clause Is Coming To Town” (McParland 2001). His public response to

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<sup>5</sup> In a 1998 interview with L.A. rock writer Harvey Kubernick, Spector's arranger Jack Nitzsche attributed the album's lack of immediate success to the coincidence that it was released on the same day American president John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. “I think some of that had to do with the world after the Kennedy assassination. It affected the public. No one wanted to celebrate Christmas in December 1963” (2003, 141).

Spector followed just weeks after the release of *A Christmas Gift*, when Capitol released the Beach Boys' own 1963 Christmas single, an upbeat record called, "Little Saint Nick." While it fared well on the charts, reaching number three, it was the single's b-side, a version of "The Lord's Prayer," sung a cappella, that stood apart, again affirming Brian's propensity for the mawkish ([1963] 1991). Its vocal arrangement is so delicate and precise that, when listened against any of Spector's grand Christmas productions, Elvis's Christmas-themed hallelujahs, or even the familiar intonations of Bing Crosby, the Beach Boys' voices go to places where none of the others even considered. That Brian Wilson would choose to produce a version of "The Lord's Prayer" in this way marked a key creative move because it starkly reflected the reach of his oddly specific musical sensibility. Whereas "Little Saint Nick" took shared cultural sentiment and dressed it up in familiar Beach Boys sound, "The Lord's Prayer"—an undeniably un-rock 'n' roll embodiment of parochialism—plays like a vehicle for Brian Wilson, the record producer, in which he isolated an aspect of the group's musicality and explored its potential.

Several months later in the summer of 1964, immediately after completing work on the *All Summer Long* album, Brian took this idea a step further by recording an entire Christmas album with the Beach Boys and a forty-one-piece studio orchestra. Following the combination of production styles used for the "Little Saint Nick"/"The Lord's Prayer" single, *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* project sought more than the procedural reiteration of Christmas sentiment; it allowed Brian to successfully integrate his personal musical interests into a Beach Boys framework.

One of these interests was the arranging technique of Dick Reynolds, the man behind the vocal sound of the Four Freshmen, another one of Brian's favored stylistic influences. As he explained to Los Angeles radio show host Jack Wagner during a broadcast called "The Beach Boys Christmas Special," part of a promotional campaign produced by Capitol at the time of the album's release, Reynolds was a man with whom he specifically wanted to collaborate for some time (*Ultimate Christmas* 1998).<sup>6</sup> After eight recording sessions, the finished *Beach Boys' Christmas Album* was divided between a set of five original Christmas songs written

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<sup>6</sup> See "Brian Wilson Christmas Interview," *The Beach Boys Ultimate Christmas* 1998.

and arranged by Brian in the group's "basic style," "kind of a teen side," while the second "traditional side" featured familiar Christmas standards—"We Three Kings of Orient Are," "White Christmas," "I'll Be Home For Christmas," for example—arranged by Reynolds according to a conventional, "adult" pop vocal style, the entire album produced by Brian himself (quoted in *Ibid.*). Approaching the album in this way required a high degree of stylistic vigilance and an evocation of adult pop conventionality not readily associated with the teen-oriented act the Beach Boys were at that time.

Though Spector's album included only one original tune, it was nevertheless significant that both his and the Beach Boys' Christmas album placed original material next to a selection of predictable Christmas songs. It emphasized their interest in a type of music that, in contrast to rock's historical pursuit of authentic expression, seldom gets noticed as a viable creative platform. The overall sound of *A Christmas Gift For You from Philles Records* mirrors the furious character of Spector's other productions, but nowhere does the interest in Christmas music come off as fraudulent or ironic; rather, its frankness implies that bringing the socially transgressive noise that made rock 'n' roll so controversial in the late-'50s wasn't central to Spector's style. Similarly, *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* demonstrated that with certain studio resources—the option to pursue collaborators like Reynolds, based mainly on his musical taste—Brian's creative interest was to record an album in a pop idiom that works mostly at the level of social cohesion, not division.

The flow of this pop currency was well illustrated by the Beach Boys' appearance on a special Christmas episode of *Shindig!*, broadcast on December 23, 1964. *Shindig!* was a relatively short-lived, half-hour, prime time, teen-oriented music variety show that ran in the United States from September 1964 to January 1966 on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) network. Taped and broadcast from Los Angeles, the show's concept was developed by British producer Jack Good with the resources offered by ABC and based on the *American Bandstand* model. The obvious similarity between the two shows was the presence of Los Angeles radio personality Jimmy O'Neill in the role of chummy host, modeled after Dick Clark. Good's innovation was to move away from the basic formula of showing teens dancing to the latest Top-40 records.

The point of *Shindig!*, like *Bandstand*, was to make performance central to the action. Shows featured several, well-rehearsed, in-person performances by the pop musicians themselves for a live studio audience of young people. Segments flowed briskly from one to the next with the help of O'Neill, sometimes bantering with Good, some mobile camera editing on the fly, and a well-rehearsed cadre of in-house talent. Under the musical direction of top L.A. session musician Ray Pohlman, that talent included the sounds of the Shindig Singers and Shindig Band, which consisted of many of the same session players regularly used by Spector and Wilson, as well as a the dance routines of the Shindig Dancers. In the beginning, ABC was unsure about how *Shindig!* would be received. Breaking with the assumption that a program like this should be slotted in the early afternoon for the after-school demographic, the network made an interesting move to schedule the show for prime-time broadcast, boosting its potential for reaching not only an audience of teenagers but other, older demographics as well.

This particular Christmas episode featured the Beach Boys as 'special guests', giving them the majority of the airtime against individual performances by current stars like Marvin Gaye, Bobby Sherman, Donna Loren, the Righteous Brothers, and Adam Faith. All of the visiting performers were presented in a jaunty Christmas party atmosphere with dance routines choreographed by Andre Tayir, that, at times, integrated the performers themselves.<sup>7</sup> The show opened with the Beach Boys atop a stage made to look like oversized gift boxes, surrounded by Christmas trees and frantic dancers in party dress, performing a new song called "Dance, Dance, Dance." Along with the audibly shrill studio audience, this opening number set a quick pace

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<sup>7</sup> This idea of mingling the musicians with choreographed dance routines is often a pleasure to watch partly because it has been all but officially segregated along the lines of a generic pop/rock dichotomy in current popular music practice. As my colleague Adam Behr pointed out to me during a screening of *The T.A.M.I. Show* at the University of Edinburgh Music Department in May 2010, one hardly expects to see dance routines at "rock" shows today, if at all. See all four segments of "Shindig! #16 (Christmas '64)," from a television performance broadcast by ABC, December 23, 1964. YouTube.  
 Part 1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2yiQgDNnjE> (6:48);  
 Part 2 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AFe4m\\_muO8&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AFe4m_muO8&NR=1) (8:38);  
 Part 3 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCjyHOzLdIg&NR=1> (8:06);  
 Part 4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrBSNfxqOuQ&feature=related> (4:38) (accessed November 22, 2010).

for the entire program that decelerated only for intermittent appearances by host Jimmy O'Neill as he introduced the other performers.

The largest segment of the show featured a quick-fire mini set by the Beach Boys including their "Little Saint Nick," and a selection of crowd-pleasers that included dippy, bullish versions of two 1962 novelty records, Bobby (Boris) Pickett and The Crypt-Kickers' "Monster Mash" and the Rivingtons' "Papa Oom Mow Mow," and a take on Chuck Berry's 1958 rock 'n' roll record, "Johnny B. Goode." By way of introducing the final segment, producer Jack Good appeared on stage seated next to host O'Neill in a Christmas sleigh to comment upon the proceedings. Addressing the camera, Good cheerily played up the Christmas atmosphere:

Hello, folks! Watching this Christmas shindig, there are young people from all over the world, from the Argentine, from Australia, from Philadelphia, from the Philippines. Young people of every imaginable sort, shape, and size, including Jim O'Neill. But whatever the difference may be, I think we have much more in common. For instance, we all like the same sort of music, and we can all share the good news of Christmas. (*Shindig!* 4 of 4, 0:26)

The action then turned to the final segment that began with Marvin Gaye at center stage, flanked on both sides by the Shindig Singers and behind by a line of Shindig Dancers, performing to the beat of his song "Hitch Hike." The glib sentiment of Good's closing words was upturned by the easy shift from Gaye's impromptu riffing during the final moment of his performance into the Beach Boys' closing song, an a cappella arrangement of "We Three Kings." Wearing a long, dark coat and a hat, as fake snow fell across the screen, Gaye, fully conscious within the fading beat of "Hitch Hike," called out, "I believe it's snowing! Yes, it's snowing! If I can only hear a carol, a Christmas carol, or somethin'?" (*Ibid.*, 3:07). As the lights over him dimmed, the voices of the Beach Boys entered first, followed by the sight of the group in spotlight, dressed in homey sweaters and scarves, to close the show by moving the imagery from party antics to hearth and home (*Ibid.*, 3:22). Good later teasingly described the group's singing as the sound of "eunuchs in the Sistine Chapel" (Quoted in "Rock 'n' Roll" 1965). As a collection of sounds and images, hollering and smiles, dancing and turns of phrase, this episode of *Shindig!* successfully combined the ebullience and levity of *American Bandstand* and *The*

*T.A.M.I. Show*—the sense that these pop performers were in full musical agreement with each other and their audience—with hackneyed Christmas schmaltz.

Behind this public promotion, what began like a competitive foil to Spector’s Christmas productions—approaching the “Little Saint Saint”/ “The Lord’s Prayer” single like a confidence exercise, riffing on shared cultural sentiment—became Brian’s license to expand into the most personalized mode of production he had yet attempted. More than anything, *The Beach Boys’ Christmas Album* showed a tendency toward stylistic mongrelization, aspiring not just to one of the most regularized pop idioms but also to Brian’s musical understanding of that idiom.

A shift in his public stance as a Beach Boy was indicated during the “Beach Boys Christmas Special” radio broadcast, when host Jack Wagner remarked on Brian’s decision to sing solo on a version of “Blue Christmas,”<sup>8</sup> asking him, “Well, maybe this will be the start of a whole new career, huh?,” to which Brian awkwardly responded, “I don’t know. It could and it couldn’t. I really don’t know” (quoted in *Ultimate Christmas* 1998). Wagner had detected something. As leader of one of the few surf groups to reach a wide American public through the mediums of radio, television and film, Brian’s challenge was to navigate his role as a Beach Boy according to varying, often conflicting, obligations. Where he thrived inside the recording studio as the group’s central songwriter and producer, he didn’t fully embrace the role of public performer. The conflicting demands of recording and promotional appearances—touring and appearing on shows like *Shindig!*, indispensable avenues of promotion—eventually became a source of formidable anxiety for Brian.

On December 23, 1964, the same day of the *Shindig!* Christmas episode broadcast, the Beach Boys left on a flight from Los Angeles to Houston, Texas, to begin a two-week tour of the U.S. In transit, Brian experienced a nervous breakdown, later attributing it to the mounted pressures of touring and writing and producing the Beach Boys’ music. He agreed to play one show in Houston before he returning to Los Angeles the following day. Arrangements for session guitarist Glenn Campbell

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<sup>8</sup> This version is so decorated by Dick Reynolds’s syrupy studio arrangement that one realizes just how sexy the same sad Christmas song can be when Elvis sings it. See *Ultimate Christmas* 1998 and Presley *If Everyday Was Like Christmas* 1994.

(for whom Brian would compose and produce a single called “Guess I’m Dumb” several months later) to temporarily fill Brian’s spot were quickly made. To fill in during the long haul, Bruce Johnston, another L.A. studio musician acquainted with the group, took over for Campbell (and, based on his vocal compatibility, was soon thereafter instated as a permanent member of the Beach Boys, both inside and outside the studio).

Once the brief tour ended, Brian made clear to the rest of the group his intention to fix his efforts primarily on the writing and producing of their records, essentially abrogating a significant public role: “I told the guys I wasn’t going to perform onstage any more, that I can’t travel. I told them I foresee a beautiful future for the Beach Boys group, but the only way we could achieve it was if they did their job and I did mine” (Quoted in Leaf 1985, 64). The announcement only reiterated a precedent set over two years earlier, in August 1962, when Brian (after already receiving ‘Produced by’ credit on the Beach Boys’ record sleeves) made his first significant advance toward creative autonomy. At a time when he was producing independent projects with Gary Usher at favored spots like Western Recorders, the Beach Boys were contractually restricted to recording at Capitol’s in-house facilities. But Brian increasingly found the acoustic peculiarities of Capitol’s studios to be unsuitable for the sounds he wanted to achieve, and he began lobbying company executives to extend the group’s options, allowing them to record at studios of his own choosing. With the understanding that the group would incur the extra expenses associated with these recordings, in exchange for an increasing the group’s royalty percentage, Capitol surprisingly agreed and met Brian halfway, but also retaining the rights to all Beach Boys songs recorded outside of their facilities.<sup>9</sup> The cumulative effect of these events was that, in both musical and business terms, they loosened the label’s administrative hold on the group. It was also significant that Brian’s decision to explicitly remove himself from the obligations of live performance was made in the context of *The Beach Boys Christmas Album*, the first Beach Boys project to shift the reference points of group’s familiar California image. By stepping in-between the teen rock ‘n’ roll/adult pop binary, Brian, following Spector, treated the taken-for-granted, cultural baseline of Christmas as justification for musical investigation,

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<sup>9</sup> For more details of this negotiation, see Leaf 1985 and White 1996.

playing at the limits of the American mainstream while gaining artistic visibility in the process.

It is clear that the historical rise of the Beach Boys from Southern California surf band to a national pop vanguard reflected a successful synchronization of industry and consumer interests. Because they seemed to bypass what could have been a difficult path to success, it is important that the Beach Boys converged with the pop mainstream quickly. One commonly used conceit in the construction of success is the paying of dues, a period of musical honing that traditionally occurs outside the mainstream, early on in a musical career; it may be used as a narrative device to explain how certain figures or sounds spring forth into wider public consciousness as fresh inventions, and it can also be used as a point of reference to explain the conventionalization of the music as it spreads. In the case of the Beach Boys, this conceit adds little value to their story, because, in many ways, their music developed in full view of the mainstream.

If pop music can be organized by market categories, these categories are mainly descriptive. Teenagers may have found their way to the center of the American pop marketplace during this period, but the flow of that marketplace was complex and difficult to explain in terms of straight teenager/adult opposition. In the last chapter, I said that the pop marketplace could be seen as an economy of information, where purchase involves a transaction of money as well as particulars about style and demeanor. To follow the money is to understand the transposition of ideas from one context to another. In this sense, the success of the Beach Boys wasn't just that their records were suited for the marketplace, but that they rallied a broad audience in agreement about what could have fizzled as little more than a localized phenomenon. They gave shape to a youth-based, Southern California aesthetic and sold it to America as an arrangement of powerful sounds and mass-mediated images. Teenagers in Kansas didn't buy Beach Boys records because they already understood Southern California attitude; they bought them because those records gave them access to a world that otherwise didn't exist for them.

Conversely, what the Beach Boys gained through commercial success was admission to a wide pop playing field that entailed its own measure of chance and

creative potential. Simplifying complex processes of stylistic overlap and music making practices to a rigid market category doesn't adequately account for a group as complicated the Beach Boys were. If familiarity and cliché are traditionally received as corrosive symptoms of pop's reach, they obscure its more complex impulses.

Pop music shapes a public life that necessarily includes both audience and performing musicians. From the musicians' perspective, to stake a claim in a mass, diverse audience involves pushing product as well as presenting a crafted musical point of view to be shared and incorporated into a larger cultural experience. From the beginning of their musical endeavors, the Beach Boys' central creative force, Brian Wilson, wasn't content to limit those endeavors to a fixed genre or even to his own group; throughout this period, he worked through numerous musical ideas, recording projects both under the Beach Boys moniker and separately, with a variety of collaborators. On one hand, he used creative investigation as a means to penetrate, absorb, and rework a variety of sensibilities into composite pop music forms, debating with the boundaries of market categories and personal taste in the process. Yet these endeavors—*All Summer Long*, *The Beach Boys Christmas Album* as much as “The Revo-Lution” and “Summertime”—didn't contrive special pockets of authentic origin; they emphasized the flow of mainstream currency in order to bring the music, as aesthetic information and material product, to a big audience. As the Beach Boys continued to play in this open field of pop, Brian's musical ambitions necessarily claimed both access and autonomy.

## Chapter Three: 1965

We catch the kids young. About 12, I'd say. Their social life is associated with their music, and as they grow older it has become part and parcel of their frame of mind. Naturally older teenagers and those in their 20's turn to a more discreet type of rock 'n' roll. They lose some of the rebelliousness of youth. But the beat has become so ingrained in their lives that they'll never forsake it all together. At least that's what we believe.

--Brian Wilson, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Beach Boys Ride Crest of Teen Craze," June 28, 1965

*What do you think of your teenage fans?*

What do you mean when you say 'teenager'? I don't know what you mean; I have no picture of a teenager in my mind. Name me a teenager. I have no recollection of ever bein' a teenager.

*Do you prefer writing poetry or songs?*

Poems; I don't have to condense or restrict my thoughts into a song pattern.

*Do you have any words for your fans?*

The lamppost stands with folded arms  
Its iron claws attached  
To curbs 'neath holes where babies wail  
Though it shadows metal badge.

--Bob Dylan, interviewed by *TeenSet* magazine, February 1966

In the preamble to his 1973 compendium of writings, American critic Robert Christgau speculates on the cultural significance of rock. He describes it as an "established, pervasive social force" yet makes a clear distinction between it and the "pop happy big beat" rock 'n' roll period—approximately 1955 through 1964—it succeeded ("A Counter in Search of a Culture"). Rock, says Christgau, is a contentious term, one that refers not to a clearly defined musical form but to an historical meeting of artistic mentalities, "something like 'all music deriving primarily from the energy and influence of the Beatles—and maybe Bob Dylan, and maybe you should stick pretensions in there someplace'" (Ibid.). Accounting for his development as a music critic and using his own experiences as a vigilant observer

and writer for publications like *Esquire* and *The Village Voice* during the mid-1960s rock formation, Christgau argues against an evaluative framework based on the opposition between a purely mass society and a purely nonconformist impulse. “Rejecting the elitism built into both modes of self-preservation, I melded the communitarian rhetoric of the counterculture and the populist possibilities of pop into a sort of improvised democratic radicalism that functioned more as a sensibility than a theory” (Ibid.). While I am not particularly concerned, here, with the specifics of Christgau’s journey as a rock critic, I believe his account is relevant because it reflects a key perspective on a key moment in the flow of rock history and points to a crucial point of musical exchange in this Beach Boys narrative.

The stateside arrival and massive success of the Beatles combined with the rise of Bob Dylan mark a critical juncture in the cultural development of rock culture, a moment when the contradictory demands of art and commerce become particularly freighted with notions of seriousness (Galenson 2009, Keightley 2001, MacDonald 1998). But as much as their achievements of artistic significance factor into our understanding of rock—the Beatles showing that making albums and being cultural ambassadors aren’t mutually exclusive endeavors; Dylan’s embodiment of folk performer as evasive pop trickster, selling enlightenment as well as records—neither the Beatles nor Dylan arrived to the story as purities of form.

For the Beach Boys, and the pop economy in general, 1965 was a year of convergences. Until then, the early-1960s pop marketplace in which they flourished was coming to terms with the commercial clout of the American teenager. Treating youth as a reliable market category, the pop music industry responded with a consistent set of options— Motown, surf, Spector, British groups—that jostled for position on the charts. But by 1965, the reach of this youth-oriented music was expanding beyond the social world of the teenager. Crossing into the purview of adult market, the music also began to breach industry-defined lines of stylistic distinction that otherwise hedged it in. Against the leveling effects of social dance and the backdrop of Top-40 turnover, the basic framework of pop practice in this period—public performance, the making and selling of records—facilitated access to a wide range of musical material. Moving through shared paths of exchange, vital figures like the Beatles and Dylan introduced new options for pop advancement,

options that Brian Wilson duly grasped and incorporated into the development of the Beach Boys. Their combined achievements, however, weren't in the overturning pop's basic framework but in the invigoration of it. Through the sharing and absorbing of musical information and ideas, success didn't belong to any single figure or style, but to the pop marketplace where they all merged.

The Beatles' 1964 U.S. arrival is, by now, so much a ballyhooed historical event that its impact is easily taken for granted (Kelly 1991, MacDonald 1998, Wald 2009). In his essay titled, "The Beatles are Coming!": Conjecture and Conviction in the Myth of Kennedy, America, and the Beatles," Beatle-ologist, Ian Inglis, argues against the standard account. He suggests that the Beatles' significance is more than a case of being at the right place at the right time—bringing new energy to the U.S. airwaves in early 1964 at a moment when the country was mourning the loss of president John Kennedy after watching his assassination on television in November 1963. Inglis defines the Beatles' significance in terms of a synchronous transposition of socio-cultural expectations, including the directional flow of transatlantic stylistic exchange, a reclaiming of "innovation and ambition" by the hands of creative individuals counter to the anonymous and professionalized character of the entertainment business of the early 1960s, a fortuitous alliance with the demographics of postwar American youth (broader means of consumption associated with an ethos of instant gratification, a nascent counterculture), and the basic principles of aggressive promotional marketing across various media outlets including radio, television and print (2000). Overall, the Beatles symbolized a youth-based cultural insurgency at odds with the conventions of mainstream American culture.

The central contradiction here is that, once in the America, the Beatles moved through a highly efficient pop economy in which the appeal of their public personalities was simply too great to have been determined solely by artistic sentience. The group's arrival in Southern California in the summer of 1964, for example, happened in a context of highly gainful commercial transaction. Two weeks before their first concert at the Hollywood Bowl on August 23, the group's marketability was confirmed when, according to one *Los Angeles Times* report, the release of their movie, *A Hard Day's Night*, claimed spots at as many as thirty Los

Angeles theaters and that theater managers had “battle plans for opening early with plenty of food on hand” (August 12, 1964). Another report talked about the group’s plan to meet with executives at United Artists during the quick stop over to discuss a second movie project, mentioning that profits on the soundtrack album for *A Hard Day’s Night* had already exceeded production costs of the movie itself (August 12, 15, 1964).

Credit for all this commercial interest was attributed not only to the Beatles’ public personalities but also to their manager, Brian Epstein. A *Los Angeles Times* profile published back in May traced the business thought behind the group’s rapid rise to Epstein’s “capacity for knowing the teen-age mind and being able to cater to it,” quoting the manager on the degree to which he had cultivated and focused the group’s talent rather than simply packaged it (May 3, 1964). It is also worth noting that, even at this early stage in their career (several years before the establishment of Apple Corps.), the group was incorporating, sharing a stake with Epstein in the British film company called Lion-Woodfall. The most interesting feature of the profile is that it named Epstein the “fifth Beatle,” the one unrecognized by the assemblies of “psychologists, sociologists, juvenile delinquency experts and dumbfounded youth workers” attempting to explain the undeniable clamor surrounding their stateside arrival back in February (Ibid.). Nowhere does the *Los Angeles Times* article mention the group’s studio producer, George Martin.

Los Angeles was properly introduced to the Beatles on August 23, when they played for a crowd of 18,700 at the Hollywood Bowl, sold-out as early as two months before. Three days after the show, it was reported that, beyond the teenage yeasayers who drowned out most of the music, the Beatles banked \$58,000 for their thirty-minute set (August 26, 1964). As a business proposition, the Beatles couldn’t be ignored.

By 1965, in a manner similar to the way surf culture had moved from local California phenomenon to national consciousness, the Beatles’ massive success in America only reiterated pop’s wide public reach. While their music and the music of their marketplace contenders sold as teen music, it played out in public life, making the look and feel of youth available to anyone. The point was made in a *Time* magazine cover story from May 1965 titled, “Rock ‘n Roll: The Sound of the

Sixties.” The cover of the issue featured a collage showing representative “boppers” of the moment, including the Shindig Dancers, Petula Clark, Herman of Herman’s Hermits, the Supremes, the Righteous Brothers, Trini Lopez, and the Beach Boys.

The article examined the music of these performers in the context of the “considerable impact it is having on manners and morals around the world,” referring to the “big beat” at the heart of its appeal (84). From Elvis and rock ‘n’ roll DJ Alan Freed to the payola scandal of 1959, from Chubby Checker and the twist to the Beatles’ February ’64 appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, watched by 68 million people (“one of the largest TV audiences in history”), writers Ray Kennedy and A. T. Baker claimed it was the Fab Four, whose “refreshingly relaxed, if not downright lovable, personalities and disarming humor” conquered the non-believing adults who thought rock ‘n’ roll was just a fad to be endured (86). As much as 40% of the “teen beat” records sold in the U.S., Kennedy and Baker claimed, were being purchased by people older than twenty (85). They also referred to a recent event in New York City when a Manhattan-based rock ‘n’ roll radio show was overwhelmed with 18,000 callers voting in a “rate the record” segment “one recent school-day morning” compared to the 12,000 who voted during the same program “during prime time teen-age listening times,” and that the majority of the morning voters came from “housewives” rather than the music’s routine youth audience (Ibid.). Rebellious youth wasn’t vanquishing the square merchants. Rock ‘n’ roll carried on with the support of executives and housewives.

Propelled by the ‘big beat’ energy of the music, the role of social dancing was key in this movement, facilitating channels of exchange and promoting the establishment of European-influenced discotheques in America. At the time of print, the *Time* article reported that the number discotheques spread across the U.S. numbered as many as 5,000, and the music was having noticeable effect on the conventions of generational division: “everywhere the couples go-going on the dance floor are like, well, old” (Ibid.). In 1965, non-partnered social dancing found a place among a wide discotheque-going public, moving outwardly from the chart register of the record, reaching all the way to First Lady Jackie Kennedy herself, who apparently preferred Manhattan’s Il Mio club to get her dose of the beat. That the twist or Beatles weren’t the exclusive property of the teenager is another way of saying that

pop music moves like time-sensitive information. In 1965, the aspiration to twist and shout was available to anyone, even if everyone couldn't do it correctly.

In Los Angeles, the 'big beat' pulsed most famously out of Hollywood's Whisky à Go Go. Located on Sunset Boulevard—also known as the Strip—and modeled after the original Parisian discotheque of the same name, Whisky à Go Go was opened in January 1964 by a business team led by Elmer Valentine (co-owner of P.J.'s, another nightclub on the Strip). Valentine was looking to capitalize on the already popular youth-oriented coffee houses and clubs on Sunset. The right mix of live shows<sup>1</sup>--featuring a resident female DJ, suspended in a box above the main dance floor, giving birth to the caged go-go dancer phenomenon as she worked out new dance moves to the records she spun—contributed to the nightclub's blooming as the epicenter of L.A.'s pop scene.

By early 1965, Whisky à Go Go had become a site where the leveling effects of social dancing were giving way to the open politicking of hip thinking and personalities, drawing a self-aware clientele mixed of young and older locals, celebrities (Hollywood actors, John Lennon, etc.), and style watchers. In a January 1965 article for *Esquire* magazine, titled "Go-Go – and hurry; it's later than you think," writer Peter Bogdanovich offered an explanation for the Whisky's notoriety, describing the way hip currency filtered through the club's atmosphere:

And so it will go until the day (could be next month, next week, next day) when by some weird alchemy the herd instinct leads the hippies up the Strip to Ciro's, where two fat girls gyrate onstage, or maybe back to Cyrano's, where the bit is to sit and talk, or maybe to New York and a new, swinging, groovy place. Now the other clubs run only half-filled or empty while the walls of the Whisky à Go Go shake and swell from five times their comfortable capacity. Cause it's nicer? Cause it's better? Cause it's cheaper? No, man. Cause it's the beat. Cause it's hip. Cause it's in. Go. Go. Go.  
(84)

Within the cramped space at the Whisky à Go Go, assortments of sound, image, and style funneled through a social swirl of action and a mixture of personalities. But against the equalizing effects of the 'big beat', this social exchange didn't collapse into straight commercial pandering or a dead end for style. Facilitating the channels of exchange, it put a premium on information, suggesting new opportunities for pop

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<sup>1</sup> Also an important factor in the conception of pop star Johnny Rivers's breakout 1964 album, *Johnny Rivers at the Whisky à Go Go*.

advancement and emphasizing the difference between leader and follower, the clued-in and the Johnny-come-latelies. The swift adeptness of this hip, youth-oriented attitude translated into more reasons to be watchful.

For the Beach Boys, previous success only emphasized the stakes of their own pop advancement, which came to pivotal convergences in 1965. In July, Los Angeles radio station KFWB sponsored a grand package pop music show at the Hollywood Bowl called The Beach Boys Summer Spectacular. Marshaled by popular KFWB radio personalities, Don MacKinnon and Gene Weed and headlined by the Beach Boys themselves, the event brought together a quality bunch of current (mostly L.A.-based) pop talent that included Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs, the Byrds, popular *Shindig!* singer Donna Loren, pop duo Sonny & Cher, the Righteous Brothers, the Sir Douglas Quintet, pop trio Dino, Desi and Billy, and a triple shot of British acts including the Kinks, Ian Whitcomb, and the Liverpool Five.

The Summer Spectacular came about partly as a response to the massive anticipation of the Beatles' return to the Hollywood Bowl for a two-night stand to take place in late August as part of an extended American tour. According to promoter Bob Eubanks and the group's press officer Derek Taylor, the Beatles expected to pocket as much as \$78,000 for their services (*Los Angeles Times* May 1, 1965). Sponsored by KRLA, these Beatles shows, just like their 1964 appearance at the Bowl, sold out very quickly and were expected to bring in lots of money.

Reports on The Summer Spectacular pronounced it an overall success, framing it in terms that echoed the meritocratic chart ethos of *The T.A.M.I. Show* and *American Bandstand*. "The fenced-in arena is the sanctum sanctorum where everything is happening," described backstage observer Mike Fessier for *Los Angeles* magazine (September). "What a great place to be—in. All of the performers have records on The Charts—the indisputable (if often ephemeral) certification of one's status within the pop milieu" (Ibid.). *Los Angeles Times* critic Charles Champlin described a similar attitude among the mostly teenage crowd of approximately 15,000: "The show wasn't intended as a competition, but the four young reviewers [. . .] who went with me thought that it was" (July 6, 1965). While Champlin acknowledged that his role as a participant observer of the non-teenage kind "counts

for nothing in these matters, of course,” he sided with the audience’s general response, saying that approving hollers were more like an affirmation of the “iron laws of talent and heart required of performers [that] are still in force” (Ibid.). Public response reiterated a youth-slanted pop music framework that put public performance and industry charts at the center of success.

If headlining the Summer Spectacular and performing in “their trade-mark striped shirts tucked deeply into tight white pants” (Fessier 1965) demonstrated the Beach Boys’ ability to maintain their position at the fore of pop’s ambit, it also overlapped with a moment when the outcomes of success were shifting. The first indication of this was the appearance of folk singer Bob Dylan at the Hollywood Bowl in September. In a tone that contrasted markedly with his review of the Summer Spectacular and the Beatles’ Bowl appearances, Champlin observed another sort of audience response, saying “The monumental difference was that his audience paid folk singer Bob Dylan the compliment of pin-drop silence while he was performing” (September 6). Without an opening act, Dylan played to a full crowd, dividing his show in half between an acoustic solo set and an electrified full band set. Siding with the audience who booed Dylan weeks earlier during his controversial performance at the Newport Folk Festival, where Dylan used the same performance strategy, Champlin said the addition of an electrified band midway through the show “undercut Dylan’s individuality, putting him into a bag, as the trade says, which is already overcrowded,” and that it was Dylan as “imagist folk singer,” without accoutrements, that allowed his lyrics to achieve their best effects (Ibid.).

Dylan’s cause was maverick. As he seemed to hold himself accountable to no clear audience, his music was gaining a foothold in the competitive marketplace. Two weeks earlier, in an interview with Champlin, discussing the industry significance of the rise of successful independent pop producers and songwriters, Los Angeles studio producer Lee Hazlewood commented on Dylan’s unlikely marketability: “Right now, the kids are so lyrics-conscious, it scares you. They listen to Bob Dylan. I’m not sure they understand them, but I’m not sure he does either, but they understand the feeling. There’s less melody and more lyric than ever. The kids know what they like. No matter how big a hype you do, if they don’t dig they won’t

buy” (August 23). Dylan’s incursion into mainstream visibility was also reflected in the range of the Hollywood Bowl audience, as Champlin described it. In his review, he reported that, along with “what looked like half the record industry brass in Los Angeles,” the presence of pop duo Sonny and Cher, members of the Beach Boys and the Byrds, the rest of the crowd included at least some of the same faces who were at the Beatles’ Bowl concert a couple of weeks earlier (September 6). If the teenage public presented a reliable market for some of these performers, that market wasn’t invariably fixed.

Unlike the Beatles, Dylan’s arrival to the marketplace sent a message that he was pursuing a certain kind of pop achievement. As he took steps to slip ahead of audience expectations, he also generated a marketable public personality. Champlin, in another *Los Angeles Times* article from August, spoke of Dylan’s ability to intelligently play both sides of a musical divide—between protest song and folk social awareness on one side, and the beat of rock ‘n’ roll on the other—and “plunking it right in the center stage Top Ten country” (August 27). As Dylan moved through the same public arena occupied by groups like the Beatles and the Beach Boys, his songs also traveled freely as musical information across commercial channels. Around this time, the up-and-coming L.A.-based, Beatles-inspired band, the Byrds, recorded versions of Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Chimes of Freedom.” These versions not only promoted the Byrds’ folkie image (the former song putting them on the charts); in the process, they also boosted Dylan’s artistic visibility among non-folk-committed watchers, loosening expectations on all sides. By cultivating an audience and playing with a sense of irony and apartness, Dylan’s counter to mainstream ‘big beat’ pop sense worked more like a commentary on the rules of pop competition than a refusal to play the game.

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Through the rest of 1965, the Beach Boys continued touring without Brian and managed to record and release three studio albums. The music of these albums, more than anything, demonstrated Brian’s intertwining of musical ideas, tending toward a mongrelized pop sensibility by applying expanded studio production

techniques and practices to the Beach Boys sound. Against the artier *Pet Sounds* period that would peak during spring of 1966, and the height of their earlier *All Summer Long*, California-themed stylings in 1964, the recordings of this transitional period reflected Brian's pursuit of a range of musical ideas and knowledge available to him. Behind the social register of folk music, spearheaded by Dylan, he found reserves in a combination of expanded studio production and a fledgling awareness of the artistic potential of the album format.

The group's first two albums of 1965, *The Beach Boys Today!* (March) and *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* (July), reworked familiar Beach Boys sound in pursuit of sophistication. In a mode similar to their Christmas album, *The Beach Boys Today!* was organized between a side of radio friendly dance tunes and a side of ballads, rich in vocal arrangement and studio production. But while songs like "Dance, Dance, Dance" and "Help Me, Ronda" refined 'big beat' pulse by scaling it back without losing danceability, the second side of *Today!* showed a clearer mellowing of 'big beat' restiveness. Songs like "Please Let Me Wonder" and "Kiss Me, Baby" settled the group's familiar vocal harmonies into gentler, sweeter areas of orchestration. *Today!* refined the approach Brian took on the Christmas album, bringing the lustiness of *All Summer Long* into a kind of musical adolescence.

Their second LP of the year, *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)*, was released on July 5, just two days after the group's headlining performance at the Summer Spectacular. While the title suggested a return to familiar themes, any similarity to the group's early sun 'n' surf fare is mostly incidental. Beyond the procedural pop exercises—including an ingratiating version of Spector's "Then He Kissed Me," reworked to fit the male perspective, sung by Alan Jardine as "Then I Kissed Her"—*Summer Days* is a conspicuous collection of Brian's musical investigations of that time.

The crux of album is the way it modifies the Beach Boys' central musical policy, linking their California-centric outlook to new pop designs. Compared to the unity of focus on *All Summer Long* or the symmetry of *Today!*, *Summer Days* documents the Beach Boys at an awkward developmental stage. Songs make specific references to places like New York City and Salt Lake City and experiment variously with new instrumental arrangements and vocal textures. "The Girl From New York

City” updates early rock ‘n’ roll by turning honking saxophone, electric guitar strumming, banging piano and drum, and a growling Mike Love into a rhythm exercise. “Girl Don’t Tell Me” is the sound of Brian working through the guitar stylings and acoustic coloring of the Beatles’ “Ticket To Ride.” And it isn’t unusual that the majority of the album’s material incorporated expanded instrumental arrangements requiring a large group of session musicians. Brian was including large groups of session players on various production projects as early as 1962.<sup>2</sup>

More than showcasing his new production techniques, *Summer Days* was the second Beach Boys album Brian had written and produced since officially abdicating his role as a touring member of the group, corralling the rest of the Beach Boys into the studio mainly during breaks between tour dates. The biggest change here was that, as in the case of two of the album’s key cuts—“California Girls” and “Summer Means New Love”—Brian was promoting delicate instrumental arrangement to the fore of a production, treating it as principal musical voice in contradistinction to the familiar voices of the Beach Boys *on their own recordings*.<sup>3</sup> The instrumentals on previous Beach Boys albums and the musical vocabulary they relied on—“Moon Dawg,” “Miserlou,” “Stoked,” “The Rocking Surfer,” “Boogie Woodie,” “Shut Down, Part II,” “Denny’s Drums,” “Carl’s Big Chance”—was a clear reflection of where the Beach Boys stood as a surf-oriented band when those records were made. “Moon Dawg” and “Miserlou” were obligatory cover versions of surf instrumental standards and their titles registered mainly as assertions of the group’s social and commercial credibility. In terms of instrumentation, all of the earlier recordings reflected surf band image (basic guitar, bass, drums combination) and style (electrified, twangy guitar-centric, driving backbeat). None of them glint in the manner of “Summer Means New Love,” where guitar serves French horn, or in the way guitar and saxophone serve ceremony in the extended instrumental prelude of “California Girls.” The release of the latter as a single in July boosted the group’s fading chart presence, reaching number three in *Billboard*, pushing forward a dance-oriented pop record with elegant glister. *Today!* and *Summer Days* showed a mixing

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Beach Boys Today!* (1965) 1994, and *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* (1965) 1994.

of musical ideas that was enabled mainly by a give-and-take between artistic impulse and marketplace responsiveness.

The interplay between commercial viability and artistic autonomy was paramount in the studio projects that followed. As Dylan showed, the pop economy was readily absorbing new musical influences, loosening the hold of reliable market categories. The pervasiveness of these categories was signaled by a *Los Angeles Times* profile of the Beach Boys and their success in the teen market that ran on the eve of the Summer Spectacular showcase. In the article, Brian explained that the Beach Boys' music represented one of several "sound classifications" (the others being the "English sound, which is still pretty much early r'n'r—they got it late; the Detroit sound, which is rhythm and blues; and the Spector sound, which results from extensive use of background instruments not generally associated with rock 'n' roll") that constitute "expanded rock 'n' roll music" ("Beach Boys Ride Crest of Teen Craze" June 28, 1965). In a roundabout way, Brian demonstrated a nimble pop music literacy that, while acknowledging the field of stylistic options, also belied the suggestiveness of the term "expanded rock 'n' roll music." Considering the breadth of studio activity he was pursuing at the time, Brian gave a rather glib account of the Beach Boys' own "West Coast sound," basing it on the "activities of healthy California kids, who like to surf, hot rod, and engage in other outdoor fun" that "seems to be working out fine" (quoted in *Ibid.*).

As *Summer Days* signaled a terminal reckoning of the Beach Boys' Southern California brand of pop, it seemed reasonable that folk music became the next area of exploration for Brian in the summer of 1965. On the same day "California Girls" was released, while the rest of the group was away on tour, Brian gathered a crew of session musicians at Western Recorders to work on an instrumental arrangement of a tune brought to his attention originally by band mate Alan Jardine. "Sloop John B." was a version of a West Indies folk song, "The John B. Sails," first catalogued in 1927 by Carl Sandberg for a collection titled *The American Songbag*. Jardine was an ardent fan of folk and had been appealing to Brian to record the song as far back as the Beach Boy's very first forays into the recording studio in late 1961 (MacParland 2002, White 1996). But it was an interesting choice for Brian, who, up to this point,

showed little interest in that type of music. The song had already been recorded in several different incarnations by other popular musicians, including Capitol label mates, the Kingston Trio in 1958, Johnny Cash as “I Wanna Go Home” in 1959, Lonnie Donegan as “I Wanna Go Home (Wreck of the John B)” in 1960, and more recently by Dick Dale as “Sloop John B.” in 1962. Apart from the icy string arrangement in Dale’s version, all of these were more or less spare interpretations, focusing primarily on a literalist interpretation of the melody.

Brian took a different tack by investigating the cache of musical options hidden behind the social register of lyrics. The crux of the session was that he approached production in the ornamental orchestral mode of “Summer Means New Love” and “California Girls.” Pursuing the same sort of delicate arrangement and modular recording style—recording one section of the song at a time, building the final production out of a selection of interlocking pieces—meant elaborated studio setups, larger numbers of session musicians, and more studio time to achieve that kind of flair (McParland 2001b, 94). Working with a group of thirteen musicians, Brian produced an ornately decorated instrumental backing track, playing up the melodic flow of the Kingston Trio’s version and the upswing of Donegan’s. Playing up the ambiguous areas between stylistic certainties, Brian treated the basic tune as a framework for an even looser interpretation. With the Beach Boys away on tour, work on the vocal track was deferred and the production was temporarily shelved.

Brian pulled further back into artistic autonomy during another obscure but pivotal studio endeavor in late 1965. But even in its obscurity, this occasion is more peculiar than it first suggests. The studio wasn’t a frequent recording spot for Brian and the material recorded seemed beside the point of any impending release. Such extracurricular projects normally commanded Brian’s attention for the recording of songs he had been developing himself or in collaboration with other musicians and performers (the Honeys, the Survivors, etc.). Though many of these side projects were never officially released, they are relevant for the way they operated as creative outlets from the obligations of the Beach Boys that typically addressed material for a *potential* commercial release. In this case it was a three-hour session held on

October 15, 1965 at United Recorders in Hollywood.<sup>4</sup> Official American Federation of Musicians (AFM) contract documentation indicated the employer for the session as Brian Wilson and 1448 Laurel Way, Brian's home in Beverly Hills, as the employer's address (Ibid., 96). The arranger Brian commissioned for work on *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* back in June 1964, Dick Reynolds, is listed as the "leader" for the session. According to researcher Stephen McParland, traditional practice indicates that the leader listed on the official AFM contracts did not necessarily mean producer of the session; instead, the leader most often presided over the session from the studio floor, a role more continuous with the responsibility of an orchestra conductor (2002). Forty-two musicians, including twelve violinists, six cellists, four saxophonists, one string bass-player, one guitarist, one harpist, three French horn players, four trumpet players, three trombone players, one tuba player, one drummer, one piano player, plus two music copyists and a studio engineer are listed on the contract (Ibid., 96, 97). Though he was listed as the session employer, Brian's role in studio was not explicitly indicated anywhere else on the document.

Aside from being the largest studio session Brian had participated in, this was certainly one of the most outlandish. Three songs were recorded, but only two, relocated from another era in American pop balladry, were officially listed on the AFM contract. The first of these, "Stella By Starlight," was a jazz standard co-written by Ned Washington and Victor Young and popularized by the 1944 Paramount film, *The Uninvited*, and later recorded by Frank Sinatra with arranger Axel Stordhal for Columbia. The second, "How Deep Is The Ocean," was an Irving Berlin composition from 1932. This one was recorded a number of times in various arrangements before it yielded modest successes in 1960 for singer Toni Fisher and separately for Frank Sinatra, who, by that year, was already developing big album concepts with arranger Nelson Riddle for Capitol.

Bootlegged recordings of Brian's sessions certainly give the impression that in the cases of "Stella By Starlight" and "How Deep Is The Ocean," the studio orchestra is utilized to its greatest capacity (*Unsurpassed Masters Volume 11* 1998).

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<sup>4</sup> In the late-1990s, a multi-volume series of Beach Boys session outtakes, alternate versions of songs, and bootlegged live performances spanning their history were methodically compiled and released under the general title *Unsurpassed Masters* by a label called Sea of Tunes. My information here is taken from repeated listening to *Volume 11: Miscellaneous Trax, Volume 3* 1998.

The vocal guide tracks, provided by Reynolds for both of the songs, are delivered with all the syrup appropriate for the swilling orchestral arrangements that had worked for pop vocal stylists like Sinatra; that Dick Reynolds rather than Brian sang them suggests that the latter was involved most likely as a participant observer. Unpolished as they are, the sound of these recordings strongly resemble the lush sound of the *Beach Boys Christmas Album* songs for which Reynolds provided orchestral and vocal arrangements over a year earlier earlier. The overall tenor is investigative.

The third recording, not listed on the AFM contract, documents an extended exercise in the construction of an instrumental arrangement of the nursery rhyme, “Three Blind Mice.” What emerged was an exploratory combination of studio performance, attentive listening and fine adjustment. Listening to the bootlegged recording of the session, Brian can be heard leading rehearsal of one section of the music with the help of a man presumed to be Dick Reynolds, working out the right balance in the sound of the strings. Directing them to follow his instructions carefully, vocalizing the staccato sounds he wants to hear, the string players are taught their parts directly from Brian and then rehearsed repeatedly, first as a single section. Joined by a snare drum, a bass guitar, and a horn section, each voice in the arrangement learns its part according to strict instructions. The group as a whole plays the music together in short bursts only after they have been enjoined to play their individual parts to Brian’s satisfaction.

Of the three songs recorded, “Three Blind Mice” stands apart in both design and attitude. The first thing to come across is a concern for overall sound. Unlike the rehearsals of “Stella By Starlight” and “How Deep Is The Ocean,” appropriate melding of voicing and musical lines are treated as more than just distinct instrumental units in service of the song. As rehearsal and taping moves forward for “Three Blind Mice,” Brian approaches studio production as an integral part of the compositional process itself. In a manner similar to Spector, he presides over the orchestra, teaching them their parts, mapping the course of the recording at appropriate junctions, so that the music builds from an understanding of audible spatial relationships.

During this obscure session, Brian worked not as a standard-bearer of teen beat, but in the mode of a pop archeologist, pursuing knowledge of sounds and practices that were the very obverse of the Beach Boys' surf music origins. He produced the recording in close physical proximity to the session players both feeding them their parts and cajoling personal performances. Contrasted with his collaboration with Reynolds and on the musical arrangement of the recordings for the Christmas album, this session appears to be a self-motivated endeavor, a more deliberate study in the studio organized process of musical arrangement and learning how to manage and lead a rather large studio orchestra. In these circumstances, completed work can be understood as that which depends on the limits of coordinated planning, matching musicians and technical practitioners appropriately within the studio environment. Understanding how the arrangement would translate into separate tape tracks and how they would fit together meant knowing what could and could not be altered once a set of production decisions had been locked into the recording. What comes through during the taping of "Three Blind Mice" is an acute sense of anticipation, a clear attempt to reduce lag between the moment a satisfactory performance has been drawn from the musicians and pushing forward before momentum is lost. Brian's role as producer entailed a level of proficiency in the synchronization of this process, and his activity here is practically indistinguishable from the recording studio methodologies that would soon earn him the very public reputation of a pop music genius.

While at no point on this occasion does the music appear to be in step with obvious pop currency, it was critical that Brian found his way through a particular kind of sound. Working through the arrangement of "Three Blind Mice" was an important exercise, and addressing "Stella By Starlight" and "How Deep Is The Ocean" showed keen awareness of a mellow but lavish pop sensibility that had preceded the beat of rock 'n' roll. Finding the right balance required a certain ear for that particular sound, one that contradicted not only the general teenage rumpus that met the Beach Boys in live performance but also the quiet repose of a folk music audience. More than anything, this session indicated lone creative enterprise. Brian was searching. But like the "Sloop John B." session, this project involved a swirl of untried musical information without a fitting commercial context.

As I said earlier, 1965 was a year of convergence. From a pop economy perspective—seeing the channels of musical exchange as inextricably tied to the marketplace as they are tied to creative endeavor—breaches in mainstream familiarity and the introduction of new musical ideas mattered. This was observed by *Los Angeles Times* critic, Charles Champlin, on the eve of Dylan’s August Hollywood Bowl performance. Writing about what seemed to be a significant convergence between conventionally separated categories, what *Billboard* labeled “folk rock,” Champlin suggested a new kind of pop currency: “It’s a far cry from ‘Wooly Bully’ [a recent hit for Sam the Sham and the Pharoahs, one of the acts featured at the Beach Boys Summer Spectacular] and the sociologists have their work cut out for them again, to determine whether this new element in the Top Ten means that the teen-agers are nosing out of their affluent private world and taking a look at the messy one the rest of us inhabit. I think it does” (August 27, 1965). New figures were exploring the ambiguous areas between musical certainties, looking for ways to advance.

The terms of advancement were documented well in another big pop event, the concert movie called, *The Big Tune ‘n’ Talent (T.N.T.) Show*. The proceedings were shot over two days in December at Hollywood’s Moulin Rouge club under the direction of Henry Saperstein and edited together for a wide theatrical release in January, again distributed by American International Pictures. Conceived as a sequel to *T.A.M.I.*, *The Big T.N.T. Show* was designed to showcase a set of pop performers in a moment of shared brightness for an audience of several hundred teenagers, except without the voting competition. The lineup of talent included all current big pop sellers: The Byrds, Ray Charles, Donovan, Bo Diddley, The Lovin’ Spoonful, Roger Miller, Modern Folk Quartet, Ike and Tina Turner, and the Ronnettes. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that, at the time of the concert, these performers, combined, accounted for record sales in excess of \$50 million a year (December 1, 1965). Musical direction of the show—including a 29-piece studio orchestra that opened with an arrangement of the Stones’ “Satisfaction,” lead by conductor David McCallum—was handled by Phil Spector. The movie was shot using the same

combination of television and movie methodology *The T.A.M.I Show* had utilized but without the specific Electronovision technology.

For all of its pop production value, mixing together a group of different acts, perhaps the most interesting element of *The Big T.N.T Show* is that it includes performances by two singers who would have appeared out of place at the Summer Spectacular only six months earlier—one by “folk purist” Joan Baez, “guaranteed to shake up many of her devotees” (December 1, 1996) and one by British folk singer Donovan. Where the images and sounds of *The T.A.M.I. Show* reflected the way pop answers the shared expectations of the performers and audience, the same thing doesn’t happen in *The Big T.N.T. Show*. There is a very clear distinction between what happens during the featured sets of Baez and Donovan and what happens during any of the other acts’. All the commotion comes to a quiet halt for Baez’s acoustic guitar-and-one-microphone delivery of “500 Miles” and a version of Phil Ochs’s “There but for Fortune,” which take place not at the central stage, but at the floor, where she is surrounded at her feet by a group of teens, with their legs crossed and eyes fixed upward, pensive. At the end of her set, the cheering returns, flipped on like a switch until Donovan takes the stage to perform “Universal Soldier,” “Reflections from A Summer’s Day,” “Bert’s Blues” and “Sweet Joy,” making young brows furrow again. Amongst raucous performances by Bo Diddley, the Lovin’ Spoonful, and Ike and Tina, in particular, Baez and Donovan’s presence at this pop music summit plays out on stage like an awkward gambit for exposure that belies their folk background.

There is an evident degree of risk in the succession of performances in *The Big T.N.T Show* that, on one hand, shows an unlikely meeting of styles. But, unlike its concert movie predecessor, there was also a degree of ambivalence about shared musical conviction. The least convincing performance of *The Big T.N.T Show* is Baez’s version of the Phil Spector-produced Righteous Brothers hit, “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling.” It is a baffling, telling moment when Baez, with the backing of the entire studio orchestra, Spector himself at the piano, audibly and visibly strains to reach the peak of the song. In its lack of consensus, the significance of *The Big T.N.T. Show* is that it documents a moment of intersection when the purpose of pop

occasion opened up. New performers and sounds were claiming a portion of the teen pop market, fostering musical crossover in terms of curious experimentation.

While the conventions of public pop performance were changing, the recording studio became Brian Wilson's haven. At a remove from the live audience environment and isolated from his touring band mates, Brian's solo studio explorations in late 1965 were pivotal to the development of the next Beach Boys album. Brian commandeered more resources for his productions, working in broad strokes generally at odds with folk angularity. In a broader conquest for new pop terrain, what Brian's latest music shared with the folkies' was watchfulness—a sense that beyond audience noise and 'big beat', other musical pulses could be heard. What the music still needed was a suitable platform, an appropriate pop format.

An important catalyst came on December 6 with the American release of the Beatles' *Rubber Soul*.<sup>5</sup> The album was released in the UK three days earlier. As a result of the way Capitol Records typically handled the marketing of the Beatles' albums in America, stateside audiences heard a different version of it. Once manager Brian Epstein brokered a deal with Capitol Records to raise the Beatles' visibility in the US market in early 1964, the EMI subsidiary hardly followed the marketing strategies of its British parent (Schaffner 1977, 23). The first American-released Beatles long-players were essentially oddly constructed compilations of songs Capitol selected from the group's British releases. Marketing the Beatles in the U.S. initially meant promoting the group's compelling personalities to an audience with different cultural reference points, and, in some ways, the actual records were actually just one piece of a larger commercial concept. Organized by the simple phrase, "The Beatles Are Coming!," Capitol banked on the looming potentialities of such a proclamation.<sup>6</sup> The Beatles' first official American LP was titled *Meet the Beatles*, squarely aligned with the aggressive promotional campaign that preceded it. By the end of 1965, the Beatles were a dominating presence on American pop charts.

After a run of big commercial success, the American version of *Rubber Soul* conveyed a new sense of the Beatles within an altered pop framework by making

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<sup>5</sup> See MacDonald 1998, and Whitburn 1987.

<sup>6</sup> For incisive commentary on this aspect of the British Invasion, see Hoskyns 2003 and Schaffner 1977.

folk sophistication marketable.<sup>7</sup> Neither the British nor the American release of *Rubber Soul* was preceded by the release of a single associated with the album. This new music was presented to the public all at once, as a whole. Brian was taken aback: “We recognized that the Beatles had cut *Rubber Soul*, and I really wasn’t quite ready for its unity—it felt like it all belonged together. *Rubber Soul* was like a folk album by the Beatles that somehow went together like no album ever made before, and I was very impressed.” (quoted in Granata 2007, 71). The musical differences between the British and American versions were mainly the result of marketing decisions, which affected both the quantity and sequencing of songs.

Next to EMI’s *Rubber Soul*, Capitol’s handling of the musical product actually resulted in a more restrained and unified album. British audiences were offered fourteen new songs. American audiences were offered twelve. Capitol excised “Nowhere Man” and “What Goes On” and released them together as a single several weeks later on February 21, 1966, instead. More significant for American audiences, however, was that instead of hearing “Drive My Car” as the first song of side one, they heard “I’ve Just Seen A Face.” Also, instead of hearing “What Goes On” as the first song of side two, they heard “It’s Only Love.”

Brian’s “folk” description is an interesting way to think about the album. The removal of “Nowhere Man” and “If I Needed Someone,” along with the replacement of “Drive My Car” and “What Goes On” with “I’ve Just Seen A Face” and “It’s Only Love” respectively, abbreviates the American *Rubber Soul* to a running time of less than thirty minutes. The presence of the latter two songs makes a dramatic difference in the album’s overall feel. Neither one of them is as audibly keen on studio production technique as “Drive My Car” or “Nowhere Man.” “I’ve Just Seen A Face” and “It’s Only Love” were in fact culled from the British version of the album *Help!*, whose American release also followed a similar pattern of reorganization.

In short, the version of *Rubber Soul* Brian heard gives a skewed impression of the version EMI released to British audiences. The sound of the British *Rubber Soul* is broader and has more textual variety. The pounding piano of “Drive My Car” and

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<sup>7</sup> It is plausible that Capitol arranged the American version of *Rubber Soul* to fit easily alongside the growing popularity of the Byrds’ brand of folk-rock. The Byrds’ version of Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man,” dressed up Beatles style, hit the public several months earlier in May. Also, their publicity was handled by Derek Taylor, the Beatles’ own press officer, who made the move to Los Angeles earlier in 1965. See Hoskyns 2003.

the lack of color in “What Goes On,” at first suggestion, indicate no easy similarity between themselves, but their electrified guitar sounds work alongside the studio gloss of “If I Needed Someone” and “Nowhere Man.” The marks of studio process are more audible in the presence of vocal and instrumental overdubbing. These elements do not subtract from the album’s cohesion, but they indicate that the overall creative tenor of the Beatles was at a synchronic remove from the American version of *Rubber Soul*, tamer by comparison and cohered more by the compatibility between the songs’ self-aware lyrics and their accessible pop melodies. The Beatles’ full abdication of live performance wouldn’t happen until just prior to work on *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* months later. However, the group deferred lengthy touring and promotional appearances until recording *Rubber Soul* was completed, treating the process with more care than they had previously done.<sup>8</sup>

To Brian Wilson, the latest Beatles album showed a new way to make a musical statement. It distanced them from the pop band orientation of their previous records and closer towards an awareness of themselves as a studio-based group. As much as *Rubber Soul* was shaped by Capitol’s marketing strategies, what Brian Wilson had accessed was more than just the latest Beatles album. It signaled a pop LP format that fortuitously agreed with his then-current creative pursuits: “I suddenly realized that the recording industry was getting so free and intelligent. We could go into new things—string quartets, auto-harps, and instruments from another culture. I decided right then: I’m gonna try that, where a whole album becomes a gas” (quoted in Badman 2004, 104). The circumstances surrounding the release of *Rubber Soul* showed that there wasn’t one obvious way for the Beatles to endure shifts in the pop economy.

As the follow-up to *Summer Days* became a looming concern, Brian treated *Rubber Soul* as a model and blank check for all earnestness to pursue his recent studio investigations into folk song and lavishness. The divide between public and private creative work widened in preparation for this album project and included an

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<sup>8</sup> See MacDonald 1998.

incubation period divided in two phases.<sup>9</sup> During the first, Brian labored furtively, without aid from collaborators. A recently purchased home on 1448 Laurel Way in Beverley hills provided a requisite enclave. Using one piano, Brian developed discrete song ideas for the new album over an undocumented period between December 1965 and early January 1966. Former wife Marilyn Wilson described this cloistral period: “Most of the time, Brian was concentrating on the concept of the album. I knew it must have been hard for him; who knew what was really going on in that mind?” (quoted in Granata 2003, 75). Brian deferred studio recording to work through what he famously called “feels” (quoted in Leaf 1996, 7), compiling an index of musical fragments and potential ideas for a broad sound palette.

The artistic gravity of the new album project meant that relying on familiar Beach Boys lyrical vocabulary was an unlikely option. Dylan’s incursion into mainstream consciousness, along with the rise of folk rock acts like the Byrds, cast new light on the importance of lyrics. As Brian engaged in creative practices out of keeping with his previous Beach Boys group efforts, he sought a specific collaborator with no previous Beach Boys association, and it is interesting that the person Brian enlisted to craft a sophisticated, ‘folk’-influenced album had no obvious affiliation with folk song.

Tony Asher was an advertising man, writing copy for the Los Angeles-based Carson-Roberts advertising firm when he crossed paths with Brian at just the right moment in late 1965. After studying journalism at UCLA, British-born Asher used what he learned from his childhood piano lessons and co-wrote with pop songwriter Kelly Gordon and arranger/conductor Tom Oliver; he also had experience as a live performer, gigging intermittently around Los Angeles in various musical outfits. While previous collaborators like Gary Usher and Roger Christian trafficked in pop songs that happened to work as advertisements for California, Asher stood apart because he was a skilled writer of advertising copy who also happened to write songs. At the time he met Brian, both were recording at separate sessions in the same studio building. After introducing himself as a fan of the Beach Boys, Tony managed to play for him some tunes on a studio piano, and they both exchanged ideas about

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<sup>9</sup> My information regarding this period can be corroborated by Abbott 2001, 37-48, Granata 2003, 69-114, and the “Pet Sounds” chapter in Leaf 1996.

songs they had in the works. By all accounts, the adman made a significant impression, which Brian later attributed to Tony's acuity, describing him as "a very brainy guy, a real verbal type person" (quoted in Leaf 1996, 17). Though his musical output for Carson-Roberts took the form of jingles and television advertisements to sell products like the Barbie doll, Asher had some direct experience of the pop industry: he was responsible for writing some of the first trade ads to promote the stateside arrival of the Beatles.

While the decision to work with Tony Asher was yet another advance towards musical ideas at odds with the familiar Beach Boys' sound, neither he nor Brian felt that direct foray into folk homily was a suitable option. Their main creative tack followed what Asher remembered as a conscious effort on Brian's part to dissociate from the Beach Boys' musical past: "We aimed to forget all that had gone before—it was not going to be 'just another Beach Boys album'" (quoted in Abbott 2001, 43). Previous collaborators such as Gary Usher, Roger Christian, Bob Norberg were never official members of the Beach Boys unit, but they shared a sensibility highly reflective of a particular period during which the Beach Boys' image and sound gave shape to California fantasy. The intensity of that fantasy was not impermeable to the sometimes solemn and brooding aspects of the Beach Boys' music, but even these early collaborations brought together a set of implied meanings about group configuration. Some of them—"Lonely Sea," "In My Room," and "Don't Worry Baby," for example—are arguably better understood as plaintive mood pieces than literalist odes to surfing or cars, but they are nevertheless associated with the fraternal swagger that produced other early songs such as "Shut Down," "Your Summer Dream," and "Little Deuce Coupe." Brian wasn't a wordsmith, and the strength of those early Beach Boys records was only partly reflected in their lyrics. Asher shared none of this history, but he offered Brian a way to find his musical bearings in a period when pop lyrics, like studio production and record format, were aspiring to elevated levels of sophistication.

This striving for artistic distinction was momentarily sidetracked, however, by Capitol's demand for new Beach Boys product they could push for the Christmas buying season. In response, (*Recorded "Live" At A*) *Beach Boys Party!* was recorded

over a handful of sessions in September. Out of keeping with Brian's increasingly demanding studio routines, recording this album happened fast, but not without thought. The principal object of *Party!* was to give the listener an impression of what it would be like at an impromptu Beach Boys shindig. The group rehearsed the material—an interesting selection of covers, including some Top-40, Dylan, the Beatles, and some Beach Boys hits, mixed together like a something-for-everyone party playlist—with a small group of friends at Western Recorders in advance of actual recording. None of the songs that appeared on the album required more than nine takes, and several were completed in no more than one (McParland 2001b). Instrumentation consisted mainly of acoustic guitar, bongos, and hand-held percussion. To evoke party atmosphere, the actual sounds of laughter and shambolic goings-on were mainly overdubbed, in typical Brian Wilson fashion, onto the finished song recordings.

Similar to his earlier independent studio projects—opportunities to gain musical fluency in the styles of the Beach Boys' peers—*Party!* can be seen as a compendium of 1965's pop convergences with an accompanying commentary. Of the twelve cuts that appear on the album, only two are Beach Boys originals. In a context of giddy covers, "I Get Around" and "Little Deuce Coupe" are combined into a self-deprecating medley, and three of the album cuts are Lennon/McCartney tunes. The most memorable moment of the whole jape is the ending of side two, a two-part punch line in which a glib take on Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'" is knocked over by a frantic, silly version of the Regents' 1961 song, "Barbara Ann."<sup>10</sup> A feature story in *TeenSet* magazine, Capitol's in-house publication, the following February commented on the arch tone of the project, anticipating a possible shift in the Beach Boys' musical pursuits: "This may seem like a waste of time to some frenetic musicians or engineers, but this is the way they like it, and this the way they work best. And with the fantastic success the Beach Boys have had, who's to say? They may have discovered a secret no else knows yet" (35). Hearing

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<sup>10</sup> If the high-pitched swill on "Barbara Ann" reminds the listener of Jan & Dean, it is probably because Dean Torrence, who happened to be recording at Western Recorders on the same date, was present at the session: "The session was for the *Beach Boys Party!* album, and when I got there they were all drunk. They started scratching around for another track and, because I was there, somebody suggested they should do 'Barbara Ann' and I should sing lead" (quoted in McParland 2001b, 99).

the group bash out these particular songs in a calculated slapdash style, *Party!* combines an interest in folk with a taste for chummy humor.

Material that didn't make the final album cut hints at the extent of Brian's musical curiosity.<sup>11</sup> The available outtakes from the *Party!* sessions available on the *Unsurpassed Masters: Volume 10* bootleg recordings indicate that, along with "The Times They Are A-Changin'," a version of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' In The Wind" was also recorded, as well as two songs performed in a style of Dylan parody. Titled "Laugh At Me" and "She Belongs To Me / "I Got You Babe," these two ditties showed an awareness of Dylan's singing style by emphasizing its incompatibility with the Beach Boys' voices. Other outtakes include a version of the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" and the Leiber and Stoller song "Riot In Cell Block Number 9." In the context of the overall party atmosphere, the songs that made the final album, combined with the studio outtakes, show an awareness of a nonconformist attitude developing in the pop mainstream. Alongside covers of pop hits like the Crystals' "There's No Other Like My Baby," "Hully Gully," the Everly Brothers' "Devoted To You," and a dopey version of the Beach Boys' own "I Get Around," the Dylan and Beatles covers are interestingly sketched portraits of those figures at particular moments in their respective careers. As buoyant as *Party!* is, its waggish demeanor bore no resemblance to the more serious recordings Brian halted to make the LP happen in time for Capitol's deadline. Instead of the Christmas album the group delivered to the label exactly one year earlier, what they got was the Beach Boy's year-end summation and wry commentary on the state of pop.

By the end of 1965, the Beach Boys had braved mass success with a series of hit records for Capitol and played concerts across the United States and overseas. Having sold the idea of California with their music and participation in beach movies and television appearances, they were living in popular imagination. These were achievements that could not have been predicted, and it seemed that, in its best moments, the music had fulfilled its purpose as a form of public life. Brian's retreat into the studio as the rest of the Beach Boys carried on as a live act entailed a different way of understanding their audience. If committing himself to writing and

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<sup>11</sup> See *Unsurpassed Masters Volume 10: The Alternate Beach Boys Party! Album* 1998.

production wasn't a complete abdication of those familiar aspects of public response, he was striving for awareness of different production methodologies and ways of applying new information to changing forms of pop practice. Significantly, these shifts happened in full view of the pop marketplace. None of this activity moved unidirectionally toward artistic purity. Dylan's crossover into mainstream visibility was as valuable to that mainstream as were the Beatles' tendencies toward sophisticated forms, widening channels of musical and commercial exchange. For Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, finding musical bearings in this period happened precariously as a matter of trial and error.

## Chapter Four: *Pet Sounds* and “Good Vibrations”

Pop careers are not gifts of the muse, they are won.

--Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train*, 1975

I don't understand why everyone keeps going on about 'Good Vibrations' being complicated. I call it fun.

--Dennis Wilson, *New Musical Express*, November 16, 1966

Since its release in May 1966, the Beach Boys album *Pet Sounds* has been and continues to be thought of in different ways. It has been treated with the careful scrutiny and personal investment according to the needs of various historians (Abbott 2001, Fusilli 2007, Granata 2003, Leaf 1985), as a malleable product for both unsympathetic and aggressive marketing strategies (Henderson 1996), and romanticized as a demonstration of popular musicological brilliance (Lambert 2008). The amount of serious examination and criticism devoted to the album is significant, and it is remarkable that the album is generally received as nothing less than a work of high musical achievement.

*Pet Sounds* fits a particular model of creativity. By 1966, the band's surf and sunshine gloss had outworn itself. Against the countercultural swagger making its way into popular music (Sten 1978, Stokes 1986), the story of *Pet Sounds* can be received as the Beach Boys' saving grace from relegation to the storehouse of Pollyanna Americana. To follow this narrative is to understand the struggle of Brian Wilson as romantic hero. It unfolds not through cultural or political forms of action, but through a funneling of creative personality into a finished musical work. Against the music that preceded it, *Pet Sounds* appears from a place of individual intent. Beach Boys historians and critics then account for the reception of the album as a special work of art, placing it in context with a celebratory narrative of its studio production process. The problem with this narrative isn't that it evokes some familiar Western cultural tropes—maverick genius, the dynamic struggle of individual expression against commodification. The problem with the conventional *Pet Sounds* narrative is that it assumes a kind of one-to-one phasing of creative pursuit,

practically free of contingency. By this logic, the album's status as a work of brilliance is inseparable from Brian Wilson's personal vision as far as this personal vision means the album *Pet Sounds*.

The underlying assumption of the album's significance is that it registered a key shift in Brian's creative thinking. As the follow-up to *Party!*, lyrical themes and aesthetic demands have noticeably expanded into areas of sophistication and nuance. This is partly a matter of technological development—the expansion of the pop album idea enabled by advances made in music playback format, which were themselves a result of broader developments in recording industry (Frith 1988, Keightley 1991), and a reflection of Brian's interest in exploring the parameters of the LP. Through some careful pop exegesis of the album's lyrics and musicological forms, we can detect a loose narrative about young love discovered, celebrated, and lost (Lambert 2008, Leaf 1996). Youthful exuberance and optimism (“Wouldn't It Be Nice”) face disenchantment (“That's Not Me”) and learn lessons about erotic attachment, detachment, and personal accountability (“Let's Go Away,” “Here Today,” “Caroline, No”). The point of such devoted listening and contemplation of the record's lyrics and music is that it will pay off in salutary aesthetic experience. One does not dance to the songs on this album as one would dance to a song like “Surfin' USA,” though, as the relationship between “Good Vibrations” and *Pet Sounds* shows, dance wasn't necessarily excluded from the project.

American sociologist Howard Becker refers to the social systems, material circumstances, and conventions that facilitate artistic activity succinctly as an “art world” (1982). One of Becker's key insights is that by following a sociology of the occupations concerned with artistic activity rather than a sociology of art itself, a subtle yet crucial distinction can be made between the teleological understanding of a finished art work (the idea that what we know as a certain work of art couldn't have happened any other way) and the notion that an art work wouldn't exist at all if it didn't happen the way it did. It is clear that the self-conscious artsiness of *Pet Sounds* distinguishes it in many ways from the Beach Boys recordings that came before and after it. In mapping an authoritative aesthetic onto the album, however, the party line *Pet Sounds* narrative fails to account for the significantly collaborative imperative that characterized its making. By viewing Brian Wilson as one of multiple players

who contributed to the making of *Pet Sounds*, the intention isn't to negate the album's status as a work of art but to reconsider the proprietary implications of what is meant in this case by honorific titles such as 'genius' and 'artist'.

The apparent tension between Brian's editorial, artistically understood decisions and the accumulated musical contributions of the studio session players during the making of what would become *Pet Sounds* is what typically individuates Brian as the creative imperative behind the album's historic and canonical rock status (Jones 2008, Leaf 1985). Yet the recording of *Pet Sounds* and "Good Vibrations," the hit pop single orphan the album begat, indicates that Brian's critical attainment of artistic status—in accordance with the conventional rock understanding of the author, where competent composer and performer are ideally indistinguishable from each other (Becker 1982)—is, from an historical perspective, problematic and can be framed in different terms. Viewing these recordings as processual documentation of a striving for pop recognition in a shifting marketplace, rather than as fixed works of art, associative stock terms like 'genius' or 'true artist' lose some of their determinative influence.

The convergence of folk with the mainstream in 1965 signaled clear change in the flow of the pop economy. "If there is nothing new under the sun, there is nothing new under the musician's moon either, except the permutations," wrote Charles Champlin in a February 27, 1966 *Los Angeles Times* article. To categorize pop in 1966 was like being a music historian, he said, as more musicians looked to older styles. This tendency toward the past was just one symptom of a larger commercial ambiguity he discussed in the article. Parsing the different pop styles—the folk rock sounds of the Byrds or Dylan himself, for example, the new focus on electrified guitar, the very notion that groups like the Beatles could make it past the "how-long-will-they-last? phase and [ . . . ] into a what-will-they-think-of-next? orbit" (Ibid.)—Champlin pointed to country western, of all things, as the one current to watch. Next to Buck Owens (a big C&W seller for Capitol, he pointed out), it was Roger Miller who edged above the crowd as the "prime piper" of country, a sound with as good a chance as any other of succeeding at the pop "wheel of fortune" (Ibid.). Champlin's point was that, in a marketplace looking for the next big hype,

there were no givens. Success couldn't be guaranteed by more of the same and the capacity to sustain a dominant pop presence wasn't automatic. Retaining a foothold in this public realm called for strategies to endure the looming unknowns.

Throughout 1966, Brian Wilson pursued currents of musical knowledge and currency alternative to Beach Boys routine. At variance with the Southern California swagger the group brought to the *Party!* album, this new music was starry-eyed and flamboyant.

Part of this is to do with methodology—in a straightforward sense, how the music was made. Session musician accounts of the *Pet Sounds* recording process describe how Brian, diligently working at the limits of studio practicability, had to convince them of the project's sincerity and get them to transpose his abstracted ideas into manageable musical material. The fact that Brian entered the studio without any written music charts meant he faced the limits of his own abilities to communicate the ideas in a language that many of these formally and highly experienced professional musicians could understand. Recording engineer Chuck Britz recalled how Brian handled the transposition of musical ideas into recording grist at Western Recorders:

When Brian would come in, there were usually no sheets, no music. Everything was going on inside his head. A lot of times, he didn't even have a title for a song. He would play it for Ray Pohlman; Ray would take what Brian was telling him and write it out. [H]e could go over to the piano and play what he wanted to hear. Which was great, because he knew what he wanted and if they didn't get it, he would play it. Then, they would play it, and he would finally get them to realize what he heard. (quoted in Leaf 1996, 53)

The musicians' roles were to provide more than the typical labor of playing notes on a score. Session drummer Hal Blaine, who had been playing on numerous Brian Wilson sessions prior to these, explained that finding the notes and mapping the arrangement was a task shared among the players in a rather open way: "Many times, [Brian] would have just a chord sheet, and somebody would run off a bunch of copies, enough for each guy, and then we would more or less make our own notes as to what sounded like a break. [. . .] We could sit down and write our own parts; we were kind of individual arrangers" (Quoted in *Ibid.*, 60). Percussionist Julius Wechter corroborated Blaine's description: "He knew the basic sound of the whole record.

When he heard something he liked, his eyes would light up, and he would say ‘Don’t change that; it’s perfect. Write it down.’ He would allow us to make up our own stuff, our own parts” (Quoted in *Ibid.*, 63).

Several of the key players, including percussionist Frank Capp, drummer Hal Blaine, and guitar/bass guitar player Carol Kaye, also remarked on a noticeable shift in their studio experience during this period. Brian was a young producer working in a style that provoked some initial skepticism until the recordings belied the musicians’ assumptions as experienced industry professionals. Capp described what rock ‘n’ roll music meant to him as a session musician of a different musical tradition: “Back in the early ‘60s, rock was so amateurish and dumb. [This] was a much more intellectual kind of rock than the three-chord garage rock ‘n’ roll of the day. [ . . . ] The one thing that stands out from those dates is that he knew what he wanted, and he would keep us there until we got what he wanted.” (quoted in *Ibid.*, 64) Blaine similarly elaborated on the kind of credibility Brian gained as a self-determined studio personality:

[T]here were times when we would look at each other, at Gold Star, and Brian would say something that didn’t make sense to us as trained musicians the way an arranger would explain something. He was some kid, [ . . . ] sometimes the way it would come out would be very amateurish, and there would be a glance around the room, like ‘What? Are they kidding?’ We thought, ‘Isn’t it something, Capitol is letting these kids do this.’ [ . . . ] Until maybe after a dozen dates, then there was tremendous respect. We realized this was no longer a joke or a fad or an amateur thing. (quoted in *Ibid.*, 60, 61)

Bassist Carol Kaye said, “Brian was amazing us with the different kinds of arranging and orchestrating, placing different sounds with different musical instruments. [ . . . ] He should have gone on to study orchestration and written film scores” (quoted in *Ibid.*, 65, 67) The attitude described by these session musicians is important for two reasons. What they are accounting for is a combination of studio recording practices and traditions into a particular methodology over which Brian presided as an authority. Unlike previous Beach Boys productions, conventional record company thought wasn’t the driving force. Here, Brian was asserting proprietary rights to this music a matter of methodological rigor. Also, when the recording sessions for the album project commenced in January 1966, the rest of the Beach Boys (with newly

enlisted member Bruce Johnston in tow) left the States for a tour of Japan and Hawaii. Their absence enabled Brian to move forward less inhibited by potential skepticism regarding the material he began with Tony Asher and leaving him enough time to produce the majority of the songs' instrumental foundations.

When the Beach Boys returned from their tour of the Pacific and entered the recording sessions, they were, on a practical level, returning to an environment both familiar and changed. When Brian announced his resignation from the obligation of touring at the end of 1965, the implicit configuration of musical contribution was officially altered. It was a game-changing move in the group's shifting modality from an ostensibly self-contained unit of musicians (i.e., a surf band with Carl and Alan on guitar, Brian on bass, Dennis on drums, Mike as live show frontman) to an open-ended studio project with Brian at the helm. The music that came out the surf band modality allowed group to move from the recording studio to the live stage and television broadcast without altering the constitution of their image. The studio environment itself increasingly anchored the music made in this latter mode, necessarily inclusive of a range of figures and their musical contributions. The position of the Beach Boys within the studio recording hierarchy, most evident during these sessions, was first among equals, the others being the session musicians who rounded out the setup of a studio orchestra. Though Brian had close ties with non-Beach Boys collaborators (Gary Usher, Roger Christian, for example) both inside and outside the studio well before the assimilation of session players into his studio production circle or the drafting of Tony Asher as lyricist for an entire album project in late 1965, this was a precarious position for the rest of the group insofar as it contradicted their public image as a band. This split between the Beach Boys as a studio group with Brian at the helm and the Beach Boys as a live act with a succession of musicians acting as Brian's shadow, in one sense, entailed a concession to personal musical vision and the encouragement of creative privacy. Together with the finely attuned studio session players, however, the work of writing and recording *Pet Sounds* was more than anything indicative of a merging of Brian's aesthetic sensibility with fervent, inclusive collaboration.

Questions of artistic recognition seemingly deferred during the recording process were eventually raised by the task of selling a markedly different kind of

Beach Boys record to the public. From a commercial perspective, Brian was pitting the expression of an individual musical point of view against the public history of the Beach Boys' success. This was demonstrated when Capitol agreed to issue one of the finished songs, "Caroline, No" as a solo Brian Wilson single in early March. The move caught some pop watchers off guard. Writing for *New Musical Express*, Hollywood-based correspondent Tracy Thomas raised some fair questions about how this might be received by the group's fan base: "Imagine the Stones planning their next British tour knowing that Mick was going to stay in London and write songs! Or what if Spencer Davis told the rest of his group, 'You go ahead and perform. I'm staying home. But I'll still record with you!' Would the fans stand for it? Would their groups take it calmly? Not likely!" (March 11, 1966). Appropriately backed with the gushy instrumental "Summer Means New Love" taken from the *Summer Days* album, this single was the first musical statement to come out of the new phase in Brian's studio production development.

To push the record for radio play, Brian conceived some promotional spots in the style of comedy sketches featuring band mates Mike, Carl, and Bruce compelling DJs and listeners through humor. "This is Mike Love, and on behalf of the other Beach Boys, I'd like to have you give a listen to Brian Wilson's new solo, 'Caroline, No'," says Mike, jauntily, over a cheesy, Top 40 parlor piano bit played by Bruce in one of these radio spots. Another one began with a loud shatter, the sound of a delicate object dropped on the floor, breaking into pieces. "Ah! We had our hands on it and broke it," gasps Carl. "Hi, everybody! This Carl Wilson of the Beach Boys, and we're trying to put this record back together for Brian, and Johnny Dark is going to play it on WEAM." Out of the muffled laughter, pieces of metal and glass clatter in the background. A kind of matter-of-fact fraternal support for Brian comes through these radio promotions, naturally droll and enthusiastic.<sup>1</sup> In a peculiar way, these sketches are indicative of the kind of creative proprietorship Brian was publicly declaring.

That his band mates would go along with the comedic impulse and contribute public support for this solo record might not have been enough to faze their audience,

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<sup>1</sup> See *Unsurpassed Masters Vol. 14 (1966): The Alternate "Pet Sounds" Vol. 2*. 1998.

except that “Caroline, No” is one downer of a tune. Familiar Beach Boys capacity for fun is suspended as Brian, in a steely falsetto, bemoans a young Caroline for cutting off her long hair, losing her happy glow, all over an aching delicate orchestral arrangement. Going no higher than number 32 on *Billboard*’s Hot 100, this solo record arrived from a different aspect of Brian’s musical personality than did “Barbara Ann,” the hit single from *Party!* that preceded it. Two weeks after “Caroline, No,” Brian’s production of “Sloop John B” was released under the Beach Boys moniker. The public welcomed this reimaged version of the folk tune with more enthusiasm than the maudlin ballad, and the single peaked in *Billboard* at number three.

The imminent album gained momentum in the spring of 1966 with Brian at base in Los Angeles while the rest of the Beach Boys embarked on three small concert tours across the United States, convening back at the studio between legs to record their vocal parts. Brian himself handled mixing and mastering the album just days before the finished work was presented to the executives at Capitol in May. Of the album’s thirteen cuts, including “Caroline, No” and “Sloop John B.,” only one song features other Beach Boys in a capacity other than singing: with Carl on guitar, Brian at the organ, drums by Dennis, “That’s Not Me” is a Wilson brother anomaly among the rest.

After a ten-month period<sup>2</sup> of investigating various musical avenues, *Pet Sounds* the album was released in America on May 16, 1966. Capitol was reluctant to support the group’s change in musical direction. On a practical level, there was a question of how to market the new music. Karl Engemann, head of Capitol’s A&R at the time of its release, recalled how the album was initially received by the label’s executives and offered one explanation of why *Pet Sounds* got the brush-off, while a *Best Of The Beach Boys* hits compilation was released just two months later:

[*Pet Sounds*] was played at a sales meeting, and the marketing guys were really disappointed and down about the record, because it wasn’t the normal ‘Surfin’ USA,’ ‘Help Me Rhonda,’ ‘Barbara Ann’ kind of production. [. . .] What I suspect happened [. . .] is that because the marketing people didn’t believe that *Pet Sounds* was going to do that well, they were probably looking for some additional volume

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<sup>2</sup> If we mark the beginning of this period with the first July 1965 studio session for “Sloop John B.”

that quarter. There's a good possibility that's what happened. (quoted in Leaf 1996, 113)

Capitol's anticipation that this new music would fail to meet hit expectations was confirmed when *Pet Sounds* reached its highest position on *Billboard's* Top LP chart at a modest number ten after first breaking at number forty-nine. By no means a complete bomb, its chart performance nevertheless didn't correlate with the amount of time and resources that Brian funneled into the finished product. By the end of August, *Best Of The Beach Boys* surpassed *Pet Sounds*, taking the number eight spot on the *Billboard* LP chart.

Reception in the United Kingdom was of a different sort. Recent Beach Boy inductee, Bruce Johnston, alongside the group's newly enlisted publicist, Derek Taylor, formerly employed by the Beatles, arrived in London with a copy of *Pet Sounds* in tow on the same day it was released in America. A round of press conferences and soirees were organized. Over several days of schmoozing, Taylor's knowledge of London's pop scene facilitated Johnston in the role of Beach Boys ambassador as he dropped the new album in all the right people's laps. Johnston also gave interviews to *New Musical Express*, and, under the tutelage of fellow Los Angeleno studio rat, and then-current London resident, Kim Fowley, brushed shoulders with Mick Jagger, Andrew Loog Oldham, Marianne Faithful, John Lennon and Paul McCartney. At a remove from the expectations of the Beach Boys' native audience, the album seemed to benefit from the kind of hype that the British pop scene, campaigning independently of Capitol, could summon. A series of well-placed advertisements in *New Musical Express* describing the new album as "The Most Progressive Pop Album Ever!" boosted its UK release in a way that didn't happen in America (July 1, 1966). Capitol pitched two more *Pet Sounds* album cuts as a single in July. While "God Only Knows" found a favorable spot in the group's live sets, and going on to become a crowd favorite, the a-side "Wouldn't It Be Nice" wasn't exactly a chart bushwhacker. It peaked at the number eight spot in *Billboard* two months after its July release.

If the flattery of *New Musical Express* boosted *Pet Sounds'* reception in the U.K., the same in-group pronouncements by the British cognoscenti ironically contravened one important aspect of Brian's musical cause. At the time, his public

and private supporters noticed disappointment over the album's failure to catch on in America. "When it wasn't received by the public the way he thought it would be received, it made him hold back. He couldn't understand," recalled wife Marilyn Wilson (quoted in Leaf 1997, 110). Publicist Derek Taylor observed that Brian was initially unsure of *Pet Sounds*' commercial potential, seeking affirmation only that the album was as good as its producer believed it was, as he later told journalist Nick Kent: "The fact that *Pet Sounds* hadn't sold at all well didn't affect him in the least. I doubt, in fact, whether it even registered with him. He was only interested in these 'Who is the best?' heats" (quoted in Kent 1994, 29). David Anderle, an MGM executive who had entered Brian's inner circle during this period as both friend and business advisor later confessed to rock critic Paul Williams that, as much as *Pet Sounds* was a demonstration of his creative capacities, Brian was "very unhappy that it didn't do well commercially, for the first time he was aware of that" (quoted in Williams 1997, 54). At its best, pop currency operates synchronously by way of occasion *and* context, and, in this sense, *Pet Sounds* was a frustrating misstep. Without the wide embrace Brian anticipated, its floundering highlighted a salient risk factor, suggesting that such a centralized artistic handle on the music included the potential to baffle the pop marketplace instead of enlightening it.

Capitol's notorious failure to support the 1966 release of *Pet Sounds*, instead hastily compiling and aggressively marketing a hits collection, is a familiar theme in historical accounts of the album, many of which frame this period as a parable about the failure to recognize creative genius.<sup>3</sup> Capitol's 1996 *Pet Sounds Sessions* box set and, in particular, David Leaf's accompanying booklet, *The Making of Pet Sounds*, saliently demonstrate the way rock history can be written through successful marketing. This celebratory set tells a story with not one, but two protagonists. With the benefit of three decades' worth of hindsight, one of them is obviously Brian. Yet by re-introducing a matured album for its thirtieth anniversary—with a generous offering of re-mastered mixes in both mono and stereo, a comprehensive selection of studio outtakes, and a dense collection of accounts of the album's making provided by the musicians, engineers, and other observers who were there—to a new

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<sup>3</sup> In particular, see Abbott 2001, Granata 2003, and Leaf 1985. For an academic analysis of the industry practices at play here, see Butler "The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* and the musicology of record production" (2005).

generation of rock enthusiasts, somehow Capitol turns out to be the second, more magnanimous hero.

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In its own way, *Pet Sounds* plays a like misfit against other significant albums released in this period—roughly May through August 1966—by Dylan, the Byrds and the Beatles, all of which indicated various directions the pop album could take. While the vastness of Dylan’s *Blonde On Blonde* packed some linear, episodic bulk onto the album format, the Byrds’ *Fifth Dimension* and the Beatles’ *Revolver* gave fomenting psychedelia<sup>4</sup> a coherent pop platform. As a group, all of these albums call for a kind of listening attitude that present the finished recording as an authoritative source of musical meaning. But Brian’s orchestral and vocal arrangements on keystone *Pet Sounds* cuts like “You Still Believe In Me,” “Don’t Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder),” and “Let’s Go Away For Awhile” are both airy and astute, comprising something like a catalogue of sound studies that place private sentiment in full public view.

My thinking here runs counter to arguments made by Lawrence Grossberg in *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place*, Chapter 8: “Rock, Postmodernity and Authenticity,” in which he ties the historical formation of rock authenticity to traits of postmodernity: “Rock constantly articulates its own authentic center, which is always on the way to becoming inauthentic” (207). One of the ways it does this, argues Grossberg, is by refusing to “affectively” invest passion in the conventional wisdom of public life. Such abdication may be attributed to a generalized, bleak postwar cultural outlook, detectable as a relationship between liberal idealism and the anticipation of cold war apocalypse, or as a tension between utopia and alienation, optimism and cynicism (205). Irreverence, irony, ambivalence, and cynicism—all

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<sup>4</sup> “Psychedelic” is a complicated descriptive, rife in most cultural studies of the 1960s. The flimsy spiritualism implied by its mantras—“turn on,” “tune in,” “consciousness”—is at odds, however, with the methodological, practical rigor that characterized the recording of *Pet Sounds*. Unlike the Beatles’ *Revolver* album—the song “Tomorrow Never Knows” being the most persuasive example—or the Byrds’ 1965 hit recording of Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man,” the Beach Boys’ brush with psychedelia is less matter-of-fact. See Carter 2009 [Thanks to Kyle Devine for bringing this article to my attention.], Galenson 2009, and Whiteley 1992.

markers of postmodernist sensibility—then become part of Grossberg’s organizing principles of rock: “Authentic inauthenticity starts by assuming a distance from the other which allows it to refuse any claim or demand which might be made on it. This ‘hip’ attitude is an ironic nihilism in which distance is offered as the only reasonable relation to a reality which is no longer reasonable” (225).

When critics and historians uphold *Pet Sounds* for its sophistication and nuance, they are not wholly incorrect. But they are often too enthusiastic in casting this innovation as if it emerged spontaneously from within an insulated setting, claiming it as one of rock’s proprietary discoveries. This thinking reiterates the conventional assumption that the history of rock is the story of organically emerging moments of constitutionally pure music making, whose salience necessarily diffuses with each concentric ripple outwards from an idealized community of musicians and audiences towards states of inauthenticity (Jarrett 1992). The winners in this modernist drama are those figures, events, and recordings that embody the convergence of these values by which rock justifies its special status within a larger musical culture (Keightley 2001). It strikes me that much of the Beach Boys’ music—*Pet Sounds* being perhaps the most complex example—does the opposite, reflecting an impulse *toward* affective investment in a form of public life rather than the pursuit of detached, “authentic inauthenticity.”<sup>5</sup>

The words “pet sounds” are fitting. At its core, the musical pursuit behind the album was based on a pop stance established by the example of Phil Spector. In terms of creative proprietorship, it makes sense that both producers shared an unwavering preference to mix their productions for monophonic playback.<sup>6</sup> Spector’s “wall of sound” aesthetic took the excesses of studio reverb and recording bleed and turned them into a unity of focus. This approach, for all of its might, succeeded primarily within the logic of the pop single format. Exploring this sensibility over two sides of a long-player disc, as Spector did on *A Christmas Gift For You*, raised important structural and aesthetic issues. *Christmas Gift* was an album in the sense

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<sup>5</sup> See Discs One, Two, and Three of *The Pet Sounds Sessions* 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The ubiquity of mono playback technology and its association with mobile youth of this period made it unlikely for teen-oriented pop records to explicitly concern themselves with sonic fidelity in the same way adult-oriented albums emphasized stereophonic sound as an incentive to purchase. See George 1987, Lanza 2004, and Levinson 2005.

that it was a collection of discrete Christmas tunes unified by a consistent musical purpose—not religious, but to speak in a shared pop idiom. It was a confidence exercise for Spector, pulled off with assembly line proficiency; the songs hold up as interchangeable, separate events in spite of their album conditions. In mastering Spector’s keyed-up instrument combinations and Wagnerian histrionics, Brian went a step further on *Pet Sounds*, rejecting their disquietude and resolving the problem of how to achieve musical space within the anatomy of the monophonic LP.

The weirdness and attraction of *Pet Sounds* is that, while it concerns itself with the album format, its musical architecture follows the drift of mood more than a logic of compositional resolution. Its musical passages build contingently from a broad palette of timbres and vocal configurations. Often overlooked by critics is the way *Pet Sounds* resembles a type of the music not made by Brian’s ostensible contemporaries. In both its spectrum of aesthetic evocations and in the set of methodological principles by which they are achieved, the album shows a strong affinity to the work of arrangers and composers who worked in the realms of mood music, exotica, and film score.<sup>7</sup>

The Beach Boys’ challenge was how to transpose this kind of listening attitude to live audiences. Shortly after the release of *Pet Sounds*, a second Beach Boys Summer Spectacular was held at the Hollywood Bowl. The level of audience clamor was only compounded by a botched sound system that turned the music into a washed-out mess. Charles Champlin described it for the *Los Angeles Times* as a situation where “vocals were completely lost in a distorted blah of rhythm guitar and percussion” and quoted Beach Boy Mike Love’s apology to the crowd for the poor quality, “The sound is terrible. I’m sorry. It’s just dead wrong for rock music” (June 1966). The rest of the Summer Spectacular lineup included Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, the New Motown Sound, Percy Sledge, Neil Diamond, the Leaves, LOVE, Chad and Jeremy, the Byrds, the Sunrays, the Lovin’ Spoonful, and the Beach Boys. Unlike the first Summer Spectacular, this pop showcase happened at a moment when live appearance before a rowdy audience seemed to be an obstacle to

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<sup>7</sup> See Friedwald 1995, Lanza 2004, Levinson 2005, Mancini 1962, and the following recordings: Baxter *Music Out Of The Moon* (1947) 1999; Esquivel *Esquivel! Music From A Sparkling Planet* (1995); Denny *Exotica* (1957) 1996; Mancini *The Versatile Henry Mancini* (1957) 2008.

musical credibility. Jeremy, of the British duo Chad and Jeremy, later commented on the Summer Spectacular experience, telling Champlin, “Now groups are going to have to start to give entertainment. I don’t mean entertainment in the yatta-tatta-tatta sense, but a performance which brings out all aspects of what you can do. You can’t just stand there and be screamed at” (July 1996). Beyond the racket, musicians who couldn’t be heard were thrown back onto their recordings, vying to push their music to the fore of innovative effort.

Unlike other acts at the Summer Spectacular, the Beach Boys had a longer history in the marketplace. *Pet Sounds* was Brian’s attempt to break the group’s association with surf music without relinquishing their foothold in the mainstream that surf itself had shaped. The test of the new album was whether it could sell change to a mass audience. What this new music lacked was the kind of slant or irony that might have guarded it from unfavorable popular verdict. The work is best informed by exploratory rigor and commitment to an overall sincerity, with the least amount of skepticism. Throughout the recording process, Brian was ebulliently active, inclusive on a meritocratic level, but, more than anything, musically earnest. Where the music failed to win over the public in a way that Beach Boys records had done before, it can also be seen as a refusal to choose between creative autonomy and mainstream appeal. The simultaneous commercial stammer and critical acclaim of *Pet Sounds* fittingly demonstrated that the Beach Boys and their ostensible Summer Spectacular peers couldn’t escape the conventions of pop ambition.

The pull of this ambition was not an idle concern. Often overlooked in standard accounts of *Pet Sounds* is the way “Good Vibrations,” an early contender for inclusion on the album, flipped Brian’s developing reputation as a production wizard by taking on the additive aspects of marketplace circulation. The emergent concern for artistic acclaim during this period make little sense without the applicable endowments of pop meritocracy. By proposing “Good Vibrations” as a stand-alone pop single, the contradictions already apparent in Brian’s sharing of studio labor were only compounded by a conscious effort to attune to aesthetic innovation and availability. This apparent contradiction is central to the

understanding that it was this hit pop single, *and not the album*, that was the more likely contributor to Brian Wilson's reputation as a musical vanguard in this period.

In terms of method, there is nothing obvious about the recording of "Good Vibrations" that would distinguish it from the creative tenor *Pet Sounds*. In the world of multi-track recording technology Brian and his coterie of session players inhabited during this period, where musical fragments could be recorded independently of each other and later pieced together in any number of possible combinations, the only thing to supersede endless tinkering and sweetening of tracks was the finality of decision. In this sense, Brian's final cut was the determining factor in what audiences eventually heard. But this is not the same as saying that what audiences eventually heard was exactly what Brian had originally conceived. Much of what became *Pet Sounds*, in fact, started as a handful of production ideas that, for various reasons, changed direction through the duration recording. "Run James Run"—as in Bond, James Bond—was a groovy inversion of the surf guitar riff on John Barry's arrangement of the movie theme; before changing its name to "Pet Sounds" and sequencing it as the penultimate track on the album, Brian wanted to sell it to the Bond film franchise. "In My Childhood" was another exercise in unconventional orchestral arrangement, pairing a child's bicycle horn with a piano played by one musician plucking the strings from the inside while a second struck the corresponding notes on the keyboard as normal. The public heard it as the second song on *Pet Sounds*, the plaintive ballad "You Still Believe In Me." And "Trombone Dixie" was a jaunty Dixieland jazz number for horns and saxophone that all but disappeared into obscurity, except that its intro was modified and later used as the opening for the non-*Pet Sounds*-affiliated single "The Little Girl I Once Knew."

On February 23, 1966, a memo circulated within Capitol Records notifying executives of Brian's plan to include "Good Vibrations" as part of the track listing for *Pet Sounds* (Badman 2004, 119). If it had made the final cut of the album, "Good Vibrations" could have been a very different kind of record. Though the final version wasn't finished until September (four months after *Pet Sounds* was released) the first session for what would become the stand-alone single took place back in February as a footnote to another song. Brian was investigating the sounds made possible by an instrument he had introduced into the studio during the recording of "I Just Wasn't

Made For These Times.” Engineer Chuck Britz recalls his surprise at the unlikely appearance of the electro-theremin at the studio: “[Brian] brought in this thing and I went out and looked at it ‘cause it had nothing but two little arcs sticking up with a vibrator going in between. And he played it for me. I couldn’t believe he would use it because it was strictly a thing that had been used years before” (quoted in Leaf 1996, 92).<sup>8</sup> While its spectral wail found a suitable spot in the arrangement for “I Just Wasn’t Made For These Times,” a rhapsody about the feeling of isolation, the theremin concept was just one among a set of ideas Brian had for “Good Vibrations.”

Early on, Brian explored various options for the right vocal sound, all of them at odds with the group interest of the Beach Boys. One idea suggested by friend and business advisor David Anderle was that the project could be a suitable solo platform for their mutual friend, aspiring artist Danny Hutton, with Brian as producer. Perhaps the most compelling option was the R&B one. In May, Brian reportedly produced a completely live version of “Good Vibrations” in this mode before considering selling rights to Warner Brothers so that it might be matched with a group of black vocalists (Badman 2004, 131). But in the end, after many false starts, the production of numerous, discrete instrumental stems and various possible configurations, it was the Beach Boys’ harmonies that Brian chose, and brother Carl Wilson who infused the lead vocal line with a bit of R&B flavor.

The record was officially released in the U.S. on October 10, 1966 and was a big success. Backed with the maudlin instrumental “Let’s Go Away For A While,” already available on *Pet Sounds*, it reached the number one position on Billboard’s

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<sup>8</sup> The theremin is the unsung hero of another story. Invented by Russian Professor Lev Theremin in the late-1920s, the instrument works on a principle of bending sonic waves to desired effect and requires a highly skilled set of ears and hands. In its early days, the theremin wasn’t exactly favored by the classical music world. Horror and suspense film soundtracks, however, found the sound very useful. Miklós Rózsa’s score for Alfred Hitchcock’s 1945 film *Spellbound* might be the most genteel use of the instrument in a film before it earned sci-fi credibility in Bernard Herrmann’s score for 1951 alien movie, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Between those two films, however, the theremin hit a fly note with the release of composer/arranger Les Baxter’s *Music Out Of The Moon* by Capitol in 1948—the first instrumental album to fondly capture the theremin’s wackiness. In fact, the Les Baxter connection became more interesting in the early 1960s, when he worked for American International Pictures, scoring music for Edgar Allan Poe horror adaptations and the famous *Beach Party* series, including 1965’s *Muscle Beach Party*, whose soundtrack also featured songs written by Brian Wilson, Gary Usher, and Roger Christian. See Lanza 2004 and the documentary film *Theremin: An Electronic Odyssey* (1993) 2001.

Hot 100 on October 29 and remained on the chart for twelve weeks. This was a dramatic turnaround for the group, whose previous single, “God Only Knows,” charted the lowest—number thirty-nine—of any Beach Boys single up to that point. Reports in trade magazines remarked on the rapid success of the single. After having several of their LPs reach certified gold status, trade magazines followed the rapid success of “Good Vibrations” and how it finally initiated the group into the “gold circle for singles,” while pop papers in the U.K. commented on the amount of record label support, running headlines like “EMI giving the Beach Boys biggest campaign since the Beatles” (Priore 1995, 45). To promote the single, Brian himself made a personal appearance on the KHJ-TV Channel 9 Teen Rock and Roll Dance Program, a local Los Angeles broadcast, to introduce the new record to a teenage audience. *Smile* historian Dominic Priore recalls the studio audience’s reception: “Brian was introduced by the host, standing amongst the kids, and talked briefly about the making of the new record. Then, it was played, and during the dance segment, the camera cut back to Brian and the host giving their nods of approval to the kids’ acceptance on the dance floor”(quoted in *Ibid.*, 167). The most famous headline of this period ran in an early December edition of *New Musical Express*, announcing the results of their annual readers poll: The Beach Boys were voted number one “World Vocal Group”, edging out the Beatles, the Walker Brothers, the Rolling Stones, and the Four Tops (December 10, 1966).

The peculiarity of such success was that it combined the feeling of pop chart meritocracy with an awareness of a pop music vanguard. In the days before “Good Vibrations” was released, Brian gave a lengthy interview to *Los Angeles Times* journalist Tom Nolan and spoke of the Beach Boys’ new musical resolve: “Our new single, ‘Good Vibrations,’ is gonna be a *monster*. It’s a song about a guy who picks up good vibrations from a girl. Of course, it’s still sticking pretty close to that same boy-girl thing, you know, but with a *difference*. And it’s a start, it’s definitely a start” (November 27, 1966). The terrific irony of “Good Vibrations”—approximately three minutes and thirty seconds of production procured from roughly seven months’ worth of recording sessions at four separate recording studios, the talents of numerous session musicians and several studio engineers—is that, though it emerged from the same “progressive” milieu as *Pet Sounds*, it is basically a pop record. In

spite of its rather distinct sonic palette, including a mix of theremin, cello, flute, organ, jazz bass, and barbershop harmonies, the production sounds less like a document of psychedelic outlook and like a more complex version of “California Girls,” “I Get Around,” or even “Surfin’ USA.”

It is also significant that, as a stand-alone single, “Good Vibrations” succeeded where *Pet Sounds* failed. If the challenge of *how to finish* a record—moving the process along with a series of determinative decisions in accordance with a creative objective and public resonance—is one way to think about the conception and successful execution of “Good Vibrations,” the defining creative problem for the album that would succeed *Pet Sounds* was more complicated. Pressure to deliver something worthy was compounded by the momentum gathered from the hit status of “Good Vibrations” and the corresponding demands of the pop album. This was partly a matter of size, both at the level of the object itself—two long-playing sides’ worth of music—and at the level of public reception, and partly a matter of eminence within the pop mainstream.

Much is made of *Pet Sounds*’ status as a rock album, canonized for all of its apparent indications of aesthetic unity and demonstration of romanticized heroism (Jones 2008, Von Appen and Doehring 2006). This odd method of rock distinction works best when it is fluid enough to bestow grace on music that can, at any time, be either in or out of step with success (Keightley 2001), and the familiar story of *Pet Sounds* is one that foregrounds the struggle of its recording against the non-believing skeptics both internal and external to the Beach Boys’ inner sanctum. While a similar case could be made for albums such as *All Summer Long* or *Beach Boys Today!*, and even for “Good Vibrations,” *Pet Sounds* stands apart. Its relative lack of contemporary commercial success, especially in context with previous Beach Boys albums, only highlights the entry criteria for rock canonization. Its release and reception marks an innovative step in an overall body of work demonstrating progress, the paying of dues and mastery of technology and format, all necessary for legitimate consideration and relevancy in a larger discourse about what matters in rock.

The story of *Pet Sounds* and “Good Vibrations” is not just a story about Brian’s creative authorship. The contributions of composer, arranger, and studio producer are relevant to the recording processes behind these projects, and it is clear that, in the case of Brian Wilson, these roles overlap. But the other thing to consider is that this approach is not unique to *Pet Sounds*; in practice, Brian’s way of making records adhered neither to strict self-sufficiency nor to open and equal contribution to the finished work. Creative authorship is not simply a matter of evident cohering personality. The question for the Beach Boys’ story then becomes what distinguishes these recordings from previous ones not merely in terms of creative process and authorship, but in terms of creative achievement and ownership? If they are received as significant works of pop art or art pop, what does that mean? What are they for? By itself, rock canonization fails to explain their aesthetic nuance and commercial contingency.

If we defer the question of artistic unity, which is tenuous anyway, the historical significance of *Pet Sounds* is that it gave “Good Vibrations” a fitting musical context. As Brian explicitly moved the Beach Boys’ music away from an advantageous position in the pop economy, fans were faced with the task of how to resolve the fun-loving sound of their earlier records with the new music. One practical problem was how to market it. Another problem was how to integrate more ambitious methods of recording and producing. “Good Vibrations” resolved these issues more successfully than did *Pet Sounds*. Success was no longer determined by the top-down determinism of brand expectation that had worked so well for the group previously. The more complicated division between Brian and his musical peers in this respect was about how he drew from a set of aesthetic principles that preceded rock ‘n’ roll, outside of music for the teenage market, and intertwined them with pop currency. In this sense, it was “Good Vibrations” that was the more convincing achievement.

From another standpoint, fitting this musical integrity into a broader awareness of socio-political conviction was also becoming a concern for the Beach Boys. Two months before the release of *Pet Sounds*, the Beach Boys played some college shows in the Pacific Northwest area of the U.S. at the University of Oregon and Oregon State University. Traveling with the group, *Los Angeles Times* critic Art

Sedeinbaum witnessed an interesting encounter and wrote about it an article titled, “Beach Boys Riding the Crest of Pop-Rock Wave.” Ushered by their manager across the University of Oregon campus, Beach Boys Carl Wilson and Mike Love came across a student and asked if she’d be attending the show that evening:

The girl, in the booted uniform of feminism, shrilled ‘no.’ The manager asked, ‘Why not?’ ‘Cause I don’t dig their music, man. It’s white man’s music,’ said Brandy Feldman, an undeniable Caucasian. The two Beach Boys loved the put-down because they understand the illogic of where they are. Pop mountain is least logical, most precarious place on earth. (March 20, 1966)

With the release of *Pet Sounds* and “Good Vibrations,” new musical expectations overlapped with new questions of where they stood on the question of hip.

## Chapter Five: Goodbye Surfing, Hello Rock<sup>1</sup>

I would say without a doubt that *Smile*, had it been completed, would have been basically a Southern California non-country oriented gospel album—on a very sophisticated level. Because that’s what Brian was doing: his own form of revival music.

--Brother Records associate Michael Vosse, quoted in Nick Kent’s “The Last Beach Movie Revisited: The Life of Brian Wilson,” 1994

This is what you do with it, because these are totems, because it was an exercise in cliché. We wanted *Smile* to be a totally American article of faith. And, in fact, it seemed to me the best way to do that, to engineer that—and *Brian Wilson would want to baffle the establishment of the counterculture?*—was to be counter-counter-cultural. And that’s what we did.

--Van Dyke Parks, Pasadena, California, August 2009

‘Brian Wilson is a genius’ was Derek Taylor’s idea. Like advertising copy dressed as publicity, it was a clever way to frame “Good Vibrations” for clued-in pop watchers. Formerly the Beatles’ official UK press officer, Taylor was an experienced British journalist who made a move to Los Angeles in 1965 to set up his own press agency under the auspices of Bob Eubanks, of KRLA radio. The two men had worked together to make the Beatles’ August ’65 appearance at the Hollywood Bowl a sell-out success during their American tour. Taylor’s timely arrival in Los Angeles coupled with the Beatles association made him a suitable spokesman for up-and-coming groups like the Byrds, helping them to play up a demeanor of schooled urbanity. Taylor’s arrival in L.A. also coincided with the recording of *Pet Sounds*. After learning about the publicist’s work, Brian Wilson made his own move to seek out Taylor’s services. In anticipation of the next album, public perception of the band in the growing realm of hip journalism and developing rock criticism mattered as much as the music.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this chapter is a play on the title of Jules Siegel’s famous October 1967 piece for *Cheetah* magazine, “Goodbye Surfing, Hello God!: The Religious Conversion of Brian Wilson,” the foundational, post-*Sgt. Pepper*’s apologetic about the squandering of *Smile* (reprinted in Priore 1995).

The Beach Boys' public image, Brian worried, had gone stale, weighed down by the conventions of their early surf and hot rod records. Their clean-cut stage fashions, for example—vertical striped shirts tucked into light-colored trousers—gave off a slightly more interesting Kingston Trio effect, while placing certain aspects of their suburban disposition into a recognizable style. As their new official public ambassador, Taylor's task was to reset the terms of likeability and, as a close observer of the group's activities, provide a credible verdict for followers on the inside and outside of the industry. "Brian [. . .] said that the Beach Boys were a strange group; he said they had neglected many things, like artwork and pictures and press, but that now things had a shape and form and direction he could recognize and describe, he didn't want to get away from them. He wanted everything to come together . . . without the striped shirts," Taylor later remembered (quoted in Preiss 1983, 40). New publicity shots showing the band in simple, natural settings set alongside interested and flattering observations were printed in Capitol's *TeenSet* magazine and Britain's *Melody Maker*.

On the subject of the music itself, Taylor went for the superlative to elevate Brian as the imaginative force behind the Beach Boys' new musical fate: "It's a future that rests largely on the curious Brian brain. In pop music, no one can challenge him as a complete artist" (Priore 21). The success of "Good Vibrations" was making up for the muddy reception of *Pet Sounds*, and it presented Taylor with an opportune moment to say something flattering about the group. By showing that a hit song could be explained solely in terms of musical ingenuity, he flipped the usual pop language: "Wilson's instinctive talents for mixing sounds could most nearly equate to those of the old painters whose special secret was in the blending of their oils. And what is most amazing about all outstanding creative artists is that they're using only those basic materials which are freely available to everyone else" (reprinted in Priore 1995, 73). Releasing a new record became an occasion to not only gain a position on the field but to simultaneously stand apart from the contingent, to stake an individual enterprise in the face of mass drift. As a hit record advanced as more than just a hit record, the purport of pop currency itself also went up for grabs. Under these shifting terms of value, the path to maturity bypassed the

conventionality reflected by Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*, Spector, and Motown, to divert from the outworn suck of the teen market category.

The idea that pop music could accommodate a purposeful message became evident when Bob Dylan's *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* broke *Billboard's* Top LPs chart in September of 1963 at number twenty-two. Schooled in the ways of New York City's Greenwich Village coffeehouse scene, Dylan made a name for himself by becoming an astute folk showman. The East Coast folk scene emerged from an atmosphere of social inquiry with an associative link to the literati of Columbia University, some of whom had been exercising the trick of how to turn cultural counterstep into a virtue since the mid-1940s.

A central theme of that ethos was disaffiliation—questioning conventional wisdom and social traditions and upholding the nobility of the individual against the values of massed consumer culture (Lipton 1959). Trust in expertise, systems of professional hierarchy, consumption, and a sense that social mobility was not just option but an imperative were shibboleths rejected in the writings of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, whose vision of America was more inclusive of its social contradictions and absurdities.<sup>2</sup> Dylan forged a link between this ethos and a wider world of popular music, bringing with him oratorical savvy and a sense of apartness—*cool*—as a counterpoint to the uncomplicated modes of teen pop (Negus 2008, Stokes 1986). Dylan's crossover occurred in 1965 when he made a point of electrification on his album, *Bringing It All Back Home*, and it reached number six on *Billboard's* Top LPs, remaining on the chart for fourteen weeks. If it was apostasy to his former folk enclave, the crossover forced entry of fresh musical knowledge to the pop economy. His music advanced further when the next album *Highway '61 Revisited* charted in October 1965, lasting twenty-four weeks, peaking at number three, while its attendant single "Like A Rolling Stone" reached number two on the Hot 100 and lasted for nine weeks on the chart.

And it wasn't just industry trade magazines like *Billboard* registering developments in pop music. Among a burgeoning West Coast alternative press, *The*

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<sup>2</sup> For some valuable insight into Ginsberg's countercultural outlook, it is worth seeking out Kimkin "Allen Ginsberg On Everything," *Los Angeles Free Press*, January 21, 1966.

*Faire Free Press* was launched in Los Angeles in 1965 by leftist ideologue, Art Kunkin, as the city's first politically provocative journal of local and national news. By 1966, the weekly newspaper, renamed *The Los Angeles Free Press*, had established itself as a West Coast guard of countercultural thinking, providing earnest social inquiry while also sharing information about alternative thinking and lifestyle. Anyone seeking to gauge the underground scene in Los Angeles and the surrounding area could also look to *The L.A. Free Press* for interviews with counterculture prophets such as psychedelics expert Richard Alpert and beat writer/prophet Allen Ginsberg.

On the subject of pop music, the journal maintained an open curiosity and a loose platform, giving a variety of figures fair consideration. Sitarist Ravi Shankar's January 1965 performance at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium and accompanying series of lectures at UCLA's Institute of Ethnomusicology received a laudatory review, as did a package show including Chuck Berry, Big Mama Thornton (February 26, 1965). But it was Dylan who positioned himself starkly against the pack. An extensive, three-part article and interview—"Bob Dylan as Bob Dylan"—published over three issues in September 1965, coinciding with his performances at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium and the Hollywood Bowl, played up to the mystique. His summation of musical intent rested on an integrity of self; "All I can do is be me," he told the reporter (*Ibid.*). Through his public persona, a set of musical practices (an aversion to electrification) and a particular iconography (the disaffiliated outsider), or at least the principles behind them, met with groomed ambition and success.

With open-ended excitement and risk, alternative thinking and ways of being had been spurring the mainstream of American society since the 1940s. The rectitude embodied by institutions of government, school, and church became explicit targets of what we came to know as the "counterculture." Dylan's music and attitude spoke to the needs of an alternative, non-teenager, non-*American Bandstand*, non-"Surfin' USA" stance insinuated by that counterculture. The suspicion was that, just as the generation that preceded the baby-boomers could adopt a "for those who think young" attitude, so could young people (insofar as they can be conceived as a tribe in

opposition to their elders) bypass conventional rites of passage to social autonomy. But the historical irony here is that, at least in America, it wasn't the toppling of government and religion that enabled non-conformity to become its own form of social common sense, but commercial imperative—the embarrassing fact that hip needed the market as much as the market needed hip.<sup>3</sup>

Dylan arrived in California as if from another kind of American life, bringing with him the idea that transaction between performer and audience was something that not only could be played with, but could also benefit by it. In the domain of public opinion, he operated in the mode of a trickster, forging an associative, baffling link between alternative consciousness and commerce that couldn't be ignored. Musically, Brian wasn't convinced. “Dylan—there's a puzzlement. To me he's always been very mysterious,” he told Derek Taylor in one promotional interview (reprinted in Priore 1995, 22). “His image isn't really rebellious, dirty and all that. [ . . . ] Is there inner meaning in this song? Why did he switch to pop? Does he like us? Does he want to be liked or admired or hated or all three? Is he putting us all on?” (Quoted in *Ibid.*). Friend David Anderle later recollected Brian's more-than-slightly-annoyed attitude towards Dylan's “hippie thing” broadcasted for the masses: “Dylan was a big thing for Brian. He felt that Dylan was placed in the music scene to end music. He thought that musically he was very destructive[.]” (quoted in Williams 1997, 42). Concurrence, even conformity, was essential to achieving success within the pop milieu of *The T.A.M.I Show*, *Muscle Beach Party*, and *Shindig!*. The Beach Boys personified this in their records, from “Surfin' USA” through “Good Vibrations.” Dylan's music, on the other hand, was showing that the grandiloquent stylings of the folk performer could also be a marketable option, presenting an artful stance toward pursuit *and* evasion of the mainstream.

The Beach Boys summarized this anxiety of rank on (*Recorded Live At A Beach Boys Party!*). Brian's version of Dylan's “The Times They Are A Changin'” and his version of the Beatles' version of Dylan, “You've Got To Hide Your Love Away,” presented it as sportive farce. Overall, the *Party!* album signaled a move that some time later compelled rock critic Paul Williams to reflect on the rub of art

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<sup>3</sup> The critical nuances of this cultural outlook can be gleaned from the following: Frank 1997a, 1997b; Leland 2004, 2007; Lipton 1959; MacDonald 1998; Mailer (1957) 1992; Maynard 1991; Roszak 1969; Willis 1978.

against mass culture in an essay titled “Outlaw Blues” (after a Dylan song, naturally) for a December 1967 issue of *Crawdaddy!* magazine. “What if good creative art is not always appreciated by huge numbers of people the instant it’s available?” he asked (reprinted in 1997, 24). Williams drew a contrast between *Pet Sounds*’ lack of public resonance and the popular reception of *Party!*, “Not even good (we thought then) in the context of the Beach Boys, let alone as a Rock Album.” Rock success wasn’t purely about synchronicity—*Party!* was a hit: “a million-seller which most of us heavy rock listeners looked down upon as a sloppy, drunken recording of moldy oldies from 1961” (Ibid.)—but about ethical imposition and progress.

Yet Williams appreciated *Party!*’s capacity for fun, describing it as “a friendly, pleasant record, recorded by people who really understand the common ground between ‘Papa-Ooom-Mow-Mow,’ ‘Mountain of Love,’ and ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’” (Ibid. 25, 27). The real contradiction was between the expression of a self-regarding musical point of view and the potential reach of the album as a mass medium, “Because, forgetting the morality of the thing, what happens to our creative artists if nobody buys their albums and they have to go back to recording in the garage?” (Ibid. 30). Advancing a principled verdict on the world through popular music came into view here as both an attractive and confusing concept. It seemed sensible that if creative earnestness had something to offer the public, in other words, that same earnestness should also retain the rights to commercialize. According to Williams, the perplexity arose partly as a matter of time, understood as progress, and partly as a matter of how to articulate individual achievement within the mainstream.

Dylan’s music gave the teenage yeasayers who had come to embody core values of the American pop mainstream an occasion for rite of passage, but it was the Beatles, on their second and last tour of the U.S., who confronted them for an hysterical final reckoning. It seemed fitting that, from their arrival in New York City and on to the Deep South and Texas, from the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest, the Beatles’ 1965 summer tour should end in California. Arriving in Los Angeles for the penultimate stop, the group took a six-day vacation during which they convened with Elvis Presley, attended a press conference at Capitol Records to be presented with

gold record number seven, marking another one million American units sold, and otherwise tried to keep out of public view.

Of all the successful maneuvers to evade the young people who showed up at hotels and airports across the country to grab a moment with the group, it was at the second of two shows at the Hollywood Bowl when irrepressible fans aimed to swallow the Beatles before their departure. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that in the final moments of the group's last number, a small group of fans jumped from out of the crowd into the pool of water that separated them from the main stage. Before the fans could swim to them, the Beatles escaped into an armored truck that was then mobbed by approximately 200 more fans who had to be dispersed by police and security officers with "raised night sticks," injuring twelve in the rumpus (August 31, 1965). Los Angeles KFWB DJs B. Mitchel Reed and Reb Foster, who accompanied the Beatles for the duration of their U.S. jaunt, corroborated the story in *TeenSet* magazine. The craze carried on to San Francisco for the last stop of the tour, whose end, said Reed and Foster, "demonstrated all over again that the Beatles are, after almost two years of dominating the American pop scene, still on top" (February 1966, 31). Even the alternative press couldn't ignore them. Claire Brush's review of the show for the *Los Angeles Free Press*, titled "Screeeeeam!," seemed as suited for *TeenSet*. "Back at the typewriter. Cool regained. How do you review a Beatles concert? Their singing is acceptable. Their looks—Liverpudlian. Their musicianship—passable. Their showmanship—too 'in' to be effective. But there they are. A fact. A great, once-in-a-lifetime act. Beatlemania? Why not?!" (September 1965). Out of the excitement that began with their U.S. arrival in February 1964, the Beatles were, by the summer of 1965, commanding the attention of the mainstream and turning the heads in the alternative press; their presence, like Dylan's, couldn't be ignored.

At the Hollywood Bowl show, the Beatles became like an abstraction of their own success, a phenomenon to be devoured rather than heard. By the time *Revolver* was released in August of 1966, they had retreated to the studio with producer George Martin and touring was a non-issue. They had discovered, like Brian Wilson, that recording was something that could be taken seriously. By the middle of 1966, it no longer seemed adequate to judge the success of pop groups in terms of an overall

commercial trend defined by common sound or image. What made the new recordings successful was that they reflected the individuality of the musicians who made them.

In agreement with Capitol, the Beach Boys' follow up to *Pet Sounds* was scheduled for a Christmas release. The pressure to deliver something current was compounded not just by the momentum of "Good Vibrations" but also by changing expectations of the pop album. Along with Derek Taylor, new friend David Anderle was another one of Brian's trusted advisors. Through a series of discussions both inside and outside of the recording studio, Brian and David had come to the conclusion that if the next album should have the appropriate business backing and support that *Pet Sounds* failed to garner from Capitol, the Beach Boys should establish their own autonomous record company. Brother Records was, as Anderle described it November 1967:

really a dream that Brian had, a nonbusiness concept that I somehow in a series of very long conversations over a long period of time, tried to show Brian how to structure it. [. . .] There were no titles. It was gonna be the first real non-uptight, positive, youth company, record company, and all our juices were directed in that direction. [. . .] Brother Records was not really formed so that the Beach Boys could make more money; Brother was formed so that Brian could have more free direction. (quoted in Williams p. 39, 40)

The Beach Boys' association with Anderle was more than fortuitous, especially given Anderle's acumen in brokering the deal that almost—but not quite—secured Bob Dylan to MGM upon departing from Columbia. Anderle himself handled the practicalities of the Brother Records. His daytime work as a businessman at MGM gave him some industry credibility, while his experience as a serious painter granted him credible artistic insight. Working for his own independent label meant Brian could move forward with the new album at a protective remove from the administration and second-guessing of Capitol's executives.

The new Beach Boys album was, in fact, just one of the events contributing to the buzz in Los Angeles about the next big pop acquisition. Journalist Tom Nolan laid out the terms of the competitive running in an article titled, "The Frenzied Frontier of Pop Music," printed in a November issue of *Los Angeles Times West* magazine. Against the backdrop of Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard, where Los

Angeles was playing out popular opinion on the latest music, modes of dress, and happenings in clubs like the Whisky à Go Go, Nolan said the pop groups to watch were the ones who could sustain wide appeal in proportion to their innovative acumen. Nolan pointed to recent releases by the Beatles (*Revolver*), the Rolling Stones (*Aftermath*, “Paint It Black,” in particular), and the Beach Boys (*Pet Sounds*, “Good Vibrations”) as evidence that they were the chief contenders<sup>4</sup>, “pulling pop music into the sophisticated present” (November 27, 1966). Importantly, it was the wide success of their earlier hits that gave them the most leverage in successfully bridging fresh aesthetic occasion with new expectation. Forward-thinking was paramount.

From Nolan’s perspective, there were some compelling predictions about where the music could go. The Beatles and Stones had explored the possibilities of non-Western sounds (sitar and tabla, for example) in their recent recordings. Songs like “Love You To,” “Tomorrow Never Knows,” and “Paint It Black” dallied with Eastern mysticism, spooky figures, and the jargon of mind expansion. They attached value to the spectral unknown and made cultural eclecticism a fashionable option.

From the very beginning, however, the Beach Boys’ sensibility leaned toward the gauche. Nolan interviewed Brian in his home and pointed out in his article the contradictions between Brian’s domestic surroundings and the reputation that preceded them: “dressed in a blue-and-white striped T-shirt and white jeans—and what with all this suburban ideal stuff completing the environment, he doesn’t look at all like the seeming leader of a potentially-revolutionary movement in pop music” (Ibid.). On top of all his indomitable “sincerity or the fantastic extent of his dedication” as a producer, it is Brian’s prediction for the direction of pop that makes an impression on Nolan. “Spiritual. I think pop music is going to be spiritual. White spirituals, I think that’s what we’re going to hear. Songs of faith. Anyhow, that’s the direction *I* want to go.” It wasn’t so much the prognostication or the language he used to describe his latest musical pursuits—full of zeal, convinced of a special mission—but his suburban setting that conveyed a sanguine assurance unbecoming of musical revolution.

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Frank Zappa, whose potentially alienating freak out ethos represented a different sort of musical pursuit to Nolan.

Alongside the creative strides of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Brian Wilson was bringing an unlikely naiveté to pop enlightenment. Perhaps fittingly, Brian spoke in LSD-inflected language. “About a year ago I had what I consider a very religious experience. I took LSD, a full dose of LSD, and later, another time, I took a smaller dose. [ . . . ] I can’t teach you, or tell you, what learned from taking it. But I consider it a very religious experience,” he told Nolan. Though Brian had been having eye-opening experiences with marijuana as early as the spring of 1965 (Williams 1997), Nolan touted Brian’s confession as a prophecy. Yet the impact of LSD on the Beach Boys’ music of this period doesn’t align neatly with perpetuated conceptions of psychedelia. It was George Martin’s levelheadedness that arguably saved the Beatles’ *Revolver* from collapsing under Lennon’s psychedelic epiphanies in “Tomorrow Never Knows” or the mysticism in Harrison’s “Love You To.” Brian Wilson’s productions in this period, however, seem strained against the impulses of “psychedelia” (as an historical event) from the start; neither his arrangements nor his palette of sounds reflect an obvious interest in Eastern instruments (the sitar, for example) or free-association musings.

More than anything, it was the word “religious” that brought with it a complex set of connotations. In the same *Los Angeles Times West* article, Nolan quoted Derek Taylor speaking on the subject of new musical avenues and destinations; the publicist recalled the highly charged mood during the Beatles’ 1965 American tour and the coincidental public furor over a recent interview with John Lennon in which he commented that the Beatles were perhaps more popular than Jesus Christ. Taylor confessed his fear that the group was in danger of encountering violent religiosity during that second U.S. visit: “I’m seriously worried about someone with a rifle. After all, there’s no Kennedy anymore; but you can always shoot John Lennon” (Quoted in *Ibid.*). If it wasn’t a glib comment on American culture, it was a curious way of accounting for level of seriousness pop had reached in this period.

Part of what made America’s complete embrace of the Beatles’ arrival in 1964 so perplexing is that it flipped the logic of cultural acquisition. Critic Greil Marcus defines one of the core impulses of American popular culture as an anxiety of breadth:

The inability of the vital American artist to be satisfied with a cult audience, no matter how attentive, goes right back to the instinctive perception that whatever else America might be, it is basically *big*; that unless you are doing something big, you are not doing anything at all. When it is alive to its greatest possibilities—to disturb, provoke, and divide an entire society—pop says that the game of a limited audience is not really worth playing. It is as contradictory and as American as a politician who can't stand dissent, who gets and keeps his power by dividing the country and turning the country against itself, and then wants everyone to love him. ([1975] 2005, 106)

As an historical event, the rise of the Beatles' in the U.S. bore witness to that core impulse—but from an unexpected direction. Yet the clamor that took the Beatles and groups like the Rolling Stones to the center of mainstream American popular culture also obscured a complex transatlantic give and take of copying and admiration. That tens of millions of Americans should be captivated by the Beatles' televised performance of the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout" on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in February '64 or be taken by the Rolling Stones' version Irma Thomas's "Time Is On My Side" nine months later in the *T.A.M.I Show* concert movie is somewhat baffling because the chirp and snarl of their public personalities belied their schooled interests in American rock 'n' roll idioms. The fluency and knowledge of these idioms, demonstrated by their early recordings (the Beatles' versions of Chuck Berry ["Rock 'n' Roll Music"], the Shirelles ["Baby It's You," "Boys"], and Motown [Barrett Strong's "Money"]; the Stones' interpretation of R&B on the album *12 x 5*) led to enormous musical and merchandising gains on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, Capitol's aggressive "The Beatles Are Coming!" publicity campaign was pivotal to this process, not just in the mobilization of resources but because of the way it notified the public (Schaffner 1977, Hoskyns 2003). The distribution of media information was framed as a kind of in-group secret shared by the entire American public. There was clear dollar value in it. But to understand the ensuing clamor was to follow the proselytizing drift of "Are you a Beatles person or are you a Stones person?"

From the perspective of American groups with a stake in keeping up with the flow of the mainstream, the fillip of the Beatles and the British groups required a second look at the phenomenon. In Los Angeles, Brian's newly enlisted lyrical collaborator observed that, by 1966, the mood of this give and take was leaning from

mutual admiration towards self-defeating pandering. “What was popular was to have a transatlantic accent and talk like John Lennon, you know, which is what most people were doing, which I found, quite frankly, revolting. We had our own culture to offer, without leaning on the British to get through the commercial gates,” remembered Van Dyke Parks.<sup>5</sup> The two men crossed paths months earlier when Parks was making his way through the Los Angeles studio scene, working primarily as a session musician for groups such as Paul Revere and the Raiders and the Byrds, and trying his luck as a solo recording artist. Signed to MGM, he recorded and released two modest pop singles—“Come To The Sunshine” and “Number 9”; and he had done work for Disney, contributing to a song called “The Bear Necessities” for *The Jungle Book* movie. As a boy, Parks left his native Mississippi to study voice at the Columbus Boychoir School in Princeton, New Jersey. He then entered conservatory at Carnegie University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as a teenager and excelled at piano (he’d already mastered the clarinet) and was immersed in the study of serious music: “No melody, no discoverable rhythm or meter—ametric, polymetric music. Whatever could confute and intellectualize music and make it brain dead, I was studying that.” At eighteen, he took up guitar and left Carnegie for California with his brother, diverging through Mexico where he absorbed Latin guitar styles. Despite this impressive background of formal musical education and acquisition of skill, Parks had little desire for celebrity and thought of himself more as a bird dog participant-observer within the world of the recording studio. It was Parks’s wit and verbal fluency that compelled Brian to offer him the job of writing the lyrics for the new Beach Boys album.

Brian’s work with Van Dyke entailed something different from previous collaborations. Where a Gary Usher or a Roger Christian brought pop reliability to the early surf and hot rod material, it was the simplicity of those early lyrics that lead Brian to Tony Asher for the *Pet Sounds* project. Parks arrived at an important moment when the hype surrounding pop’s innovators was riding high. As he explained it to Derek Taylor, Brian worried the group’s surfer image made them appear Pollyannaish—*unhip*—in the eyes of the changing pop landscape. An

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all words by Van Dyke Parks are taken from a personal interview conducted by the author at Parks’s home in Pasadena, California, August 19, 2009.

undeniable aspect of that image was a Southern California specificity that drew as much from the vocabulary of the surfer (“Surfin’ USA”) as from the life of the Southland suburban teenager (“In My Room,” “Fun, Fun, Fun”). Against the new musical cause (socially conscious, inquisitive, anxious), the California depicted by the Beach Boys’ early surf and hot rod records appeared unschooled, manufactured, in a way that inconvenienced their chance to become a relevant part of the changing ranks.

Paradoxically, it was a similar idea of place that led a younger Van Dyke Parks to California before he found work as a studio musician. Ditching the world of classical music study and performance, an eighteen-year-old Parks and his brother worked their way through coffee houses as traveling musicians in the early ‘60s, compelled by what he called a “power of thought”:

That thought being Steinbeck, Saroyan, Robinson Jeffers, Henry Miller. This was, to me, California. With Big Sur and Fresno and Sacramento and Mark Twain, of course—all of these things and aspects of literature were what California was to me. It was still an idealized thing, but I came out.

Parks brought to the table a thoughtful awareness of California as an idea, a double-exposed image informed by literary tradition and history. He didn’t lack for a sense of mission, but he was reluctant to carry himself with the conspicuous hippie demeanor that made some of his colleagues popular in the music scene—“I was in the studios, and I played with the Byrds on that first record. I didn’t want to be in a group, you know. I was offered to be in the group, but I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to go where I thought the music was. It wasn’t around screaming girls. That was inconvenient to me. It seemed embarrassing.” For his part in the collaboration, there was to be no concern for slanted British emulation or the socially conscious stylings of Dylan or the Byrds. It was an unlikely perspective but one that was sensitive to the Beach Boys’ California-based iconography, the implications of their musical history, and Brian’s interest in transposing this content into something current.

At that moment, the Beach Boys were in a precarious position. The advancement of social conviction through song lyrics (Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Donovan) loosened the expectations of pop song language. In one way, Van Dyke

was fulfilling the same position that Tony Asher had filled before him, and Gary Usher before that: the necessary work of giving Brian's music a cogent accessibility. Replicating Dylan was an unlikely course of action for the group who made "Fun, Fun, Fun" a hit. The potency of Beach Boys lyrics ("well, she got her daddy's car, and she cruised to the hamburger stand, now," for example) was that they didn't adjudicate on anything other than themselves.

As counterculture made social consciousness and universal love viable pop themes, Brian and Van Dyke went for an alternative. If pop musicians and their audiences suddenly had the option to reject "the establishment," "the system," the idea here was to avoid obvious social commentary and start from a place of shared cultural inheritance. From the beginning, Parks adhered to the rule that his lyrics would follow Brian's music:

That's ground floor, folks: write what you know! That's a definite rule of etiquette. Anything else is to invite a catastrophe. And that, to me, was the way to start connecting the dots so that what I knew was that I shared in a manifest destiny; and that's what I wanted to lay out in Brian's cartoon consciousness of music, which is what I was hearing. I was simply listening to someone's music and trying to infer its intent. And in the case of "Heroes and Villains," which was the first one, it sounded to me very much like a ballad, similar to the epic style of Marty Robbins when he came out with his record, "El Paso." I thought of "El Paso" when I heard it—a story about an ancient adventure and the rough and rowdy west. That's what that tune sounded like to me: a heroic ballad. And it was just as easy as pie to realize, within the number of syllables that were given to me, without adding or subtracting a syllable, that what he was saying was, "I've been in this town so long that back in the city I've been taken for lost and gone and unknown for a long, long time."

Fanciful and intentionally droll, "Heroes and Villains" set the general tenor for the album project. They called it *Dumb Angel* at first before switching to the more direct title, *Smile*. Van Dyke summarized it as "cartoon consciousness," but, in fact, any one of these terms were apt signposts for the music. Rather than conceiving of their work as a weapon for ending war or as a tool for psychedelic enlightenment, they chose a stance of exaggerated musical and lyrical quirk. Playing within the divide that posited hip enlightenment (LSD, folkie speech making) against status quo (Puritan heritage, mass consumption, optimism), Brian and Van Dyke sketched a version of America in which neither side seemed convincing and the whole lot was up for grabs.

Charged by zeal and a sense of comic timing, the music of *Smile* conjures hackneyed images of America as much as it plays with their associative value.<sup>6</sup> Brian and Van Dyke spin an interpretation of a nation born of special mission and laughter. Holding on to certain caricatures, the overall effect is a revision of American cultural inheritance as those parodies change shape according to jocose misrule. In terms of lyrical themes, much of *Smile* is about America's transition from an agrarian past to an industrialized present. Conceived as the album's opener, "Prayer" takes signature Beach Boys harmony and applies it to a short wordless hymn, sung a cappella. Its harmonic streams billow upward, hinting that if there was anything meaningful in the founding of the eighteenth-century Spanish missions of Old California, Brian had interpreted here as piece of pop liturgy. "Cabinessence" evokes rustic practicability (pairing cheeky lyrics like "Over and over, the crow cries uncover the cornfield" with banjo) and the establishment of the railroad system ("Who ran the iron horse? Who ran the iron horse?" syncopated with bellowing fuzz bass) as a comment on the nature of industrialization. "Do You Like Worms?" plays out America's passage from Old World to New World as a succession of musical non-sequiturs; from Brian's singing about the Pilgrims' arrival on the Mayflower ("Rock, rock, roll, Plymouth Rock roll over"), which then flips into a circular harpsichord melody and guttural incantations, to the acquisition of Hawaiian Islands, presented a languorous section of Pacific exotica, inclusive of Hawaiian chants ("Mahalo lu le, mahalo lu la, keeni waka pula") and slide guitar.

In other places, Brian interpolated obscure American pop songs into new arrangements. One vocal section of "Heroes and Villains" inserts the line, "How I love my girl!," from "Gee," a tune recorded and made famous in 1953 by the New York doo wop group, the Crows. Sections of "You Are My Sunshine," written by Jimmie Davis and Charles Mitchell and recorded by American Southern groups for

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<sup>6</sup> A variety of recordings, official and unofficially released, and encyclopedic tomes attempting to piece together an appropriate history of the *Smile* sessions are available. My analysis here is based on the research of Badman 2004, Elliot 1994, McParland 2001, Priore 1995 (all of them individual mines of information on key events, session dates, and releases pertaining to *Smile*), official recordings available on the second disc of Capitol's 1998 five-CD box set, *Good Vibrations: Thirty Years of The Beach Boys*, and the unofficial three-CD bootleg set, *Unsurpassed Masters Vol. 17: Smile Sessions (1966-1967)* 1999, which contains a profusion of outtakes, overdubs, and unfinished material spanning the majority of the *Smile* recording sessions, from approximately spring 1966 to spring 1967.

the Bluebird and Decca labels in the late 1930s, are combined with a melody taken from “The Old Master Painter,” a later obscurity written by Beasley Smith and Haven Gillespie, recorded by Mel Torme, for Capitol, and later by Frank Sinatra, for Columbia.

Such interpolation might have been a simple example of what *Los Angeles Times* critic Charles Champlin regarded as a tendency for pop musicians in 1966 to regress back to older pop compositions and styles (see previous chapter), except that Brian and Van Dyke’s efforts encompassed something more than a display of knowledge. Van Dyke referred to their work on *Smile* as a way of conceiving “a more appropriate history, a review of what the United States really is,” without subscribing to the contemporary pop trending toward British- or folk-inflected styles. In a more complex sense, they were dealing with the stuff of Americana, inclusive of its natural hokeyness, but *without* irony. Risking fashionability, this unlikely creative questing took on incongruous qualities of burlesque and grave conviction to find a mutually constitutive relationship between them. It combined fragments of shared history and cant, folded them together into a musical reconfiguration of American consciousness, and fittingly expressed this in tones of exaggerated humor and Pentecostal intensity. As the platform for grand pop statements widened to include increasingly sophisticated recording formats, expanded knowledge of older musical styles, the music of *Smile* sidestepped the polemics of social affiliation. Exercising their claim to any of the American idioms available to them, Brian and Van Dyke posited a means for pop advancement regardless of its agreement or disagreement with countercultural cause.

Cryptic information about their musical activity surfaced in the *New Musical Express* as part the publication’s coverage of the Beach Boys’ November 1966 UK tour. Interviews with the group focused on a noticeable change in the new recordings and hinted at how they might take form as an album. The reports included some funny quotes from Carl and Dennis explaining the new material. “We believe in God as a kind of universal consciousness. It’s a spiritual concept which inspires a great deal of our music,” said Carl. Reporter Keith Altham also mentioned one new tune called “Child Of The Man,” one of Brian’s new “cowboy” songs that Dennis played for him a piano before also sharing “a prayer I’m working on for it” (November 11,

1966). When not rhapsodizing about the importance of spirituality, other reports on the new music raised questions about how far-out it was getting and what that could mean for live shows. Dennis and Carl rejected the idea that “Good Vibrations” should be received as a “complicated” record, and that it was simply “fun.” Descriptions of “a very Hawaiian-influenced track, sung in Hawaiian, no less!” were backed with quotes by Al Jardine, saying, “This is by far the most the best thing we’ve ever done! Everything—the music, lyrics, singing, background—everything is perfect.” “I’m using some new production techniques that I think will surprise everyone. I can’t actually describe the effect—you have to hear it,” Brian himself told *NME*’s Hollywood correspondent, Tracy Thomas. “The album will include lots of humour—some musical and some spoken. It won’t be like a comedy LP—there won’t be any spoken tracks as such—but someone might say something in between verses” (November 18, 1966, December 17, 1966).

Brian’s sensitivity to humor is key here. The overall tone and general content of *Smile* reflects a characteristic interest in what cultural scholars Constance Rourke and F.O. Matthiessen have described as a representative trait of the American disposition—uncouth and roughly sincere, “half bravado, half cockalorum” with a capacity for using “realism and fantastic extravagance” to forge “a union of incongruities most natural to American humor” (1931, 17; 1941, 624). *Smile* was, in fact, a culmination of Brian’s exploration of comedy that went back at least to the summer of 1965, traceable through a series of studio exercises, all of which can be understood as the sportive foiling of musical expectations Brian perpetuated in his official Beach Boys capacity. On each occasion, aesthetic incongruity is sought for the balancing sense of humor it can arouse.

The first instance was a production called “I’m Bugged At My Ol’ Man,” which wound up as the penultimate cut on the *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* album. It stands out mostly as a misfit filler track between the beach-y, dreamy instrumental “Summer Means New Love” and the vocal swill of the album’s final cut, “And Your Dreams Come True.” With Brian’s wailing falsetto, echoed by the rest of the group in fraternal agreement, all against a pounding piano, “I’m Bugged At My Ol’ Man” is a loaded Freudian slip about a young boy’s frustration with his heavy-handed father. Its self-contained humor detracts from the LP’s general

breeziness; still, given the known tension between Brian and father Murry, the lyrical metaphors and references (“Why did he sell my surfboard and cut off my hair last night in my sleep?” “I’m bugged at my ol’ man, and he doesn’t even know where it’s at!”) are arch enough to make you grin and transparent enough to make you wince.

Another instance involved a studio session with The Honeys in November 1965. Using the tune for “Row Row Row Your Boat,” the first half of the session was an exercise in vocal production technique; but for the remainder of the session, Brian explored ways to translate sketch comedy into record production. “Dick” and “Fuzz” were mainly sketches of aimless banter and puerile double entendre, but Brian was particularly concerned with the quality of the girls’ voices. He treated their laughter no differently than any other source of recordable sound, directing them to speak and laugh their parts this way or that as it suited his conception of how the pieces would fit together as a coherent work of produced comedy.

Several months later, during one *Pet Sounds* session, Brian bantered with the session musicians in between takes for “Hang On To Your Ego,” also known as “I Know There’s An Answer” (“Just *relax*, me and this other cat are gonna’ straighten you guys out, and then we’ll get, you know, *woorld peace!*”), enthusing over his recent discovery of the 1959 comedy album *How To Speak Hip* (“Has anybody ever heard it? Oh, it’s funny. It’s a very funny album.”). Recorded by comedians Del Close and John Brent, the parody record presents itself as a detailed lesson for learning hipster cant (the meaning and proper usage of terms like “dig,” “what a drag,” “hung up”) and beatnik philosophy (the principles of the “put on,” the “put down,” the “come on,” the “come down”). Brian was clearly taken by Close and Brent’s brand of sarcasm and even briefly referred to another *Pet Sounds* tune as “Let’s Go Away For Awhile (And Then We’ll Have World Peace).”<sup>7</sup> In the case of *Smile*, the prevailing social discord between mainstream and counterculture attitudes was flipped, turning from a prescriptive set of stylistic gestures to be mastered into a source of musical invention by way of symbol and cliché.

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<sup>7</sup> See *How To Speak Hip* (1959) 2009, *Pet Sounds Sessions*, Disc Two 1996, *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* (1965) 1994, and *Unsurpassed Masters Vol. 14, The Alternate “Pet Sounds” Album Vol. 2*, Disc Four 1998.

Capitol planned to release *Smile* in time for the 1966 Christmas buying season, and Brian was expected to deliver a complete master of the new album the middle of December. When the deadline came, the album was still incomplete. To convince Capitol it was almost finished, Brian reportedly delivered a handwritten list of the cuts to be included on the finished album (Badman 2004). The final running order was undetermined, but the label was willing to accommodate Brian's ideas for artwork and packaging. At Van Dyke's urging, Los Angeles-based artist, Frank Holmes, was commissioned to provide a set of illustrations to accompany a series of arty, color portraits of the group by photographer Guy Webster. Neither Holmes nor Webster was a member of the Capitol team responsible for packaging previous Beach Boys records, but they were part of Brian's expanding network of friends and associates in the L.A. hip pop scene at the time. The planned twelve-page color insert was to be both an incentive to buy the record and a way of framing the album's thematic content, a way into the "cartoon consciousness" of the music. For his part, Holmes's color drawings were simple, direct evocations of Americana and literal visual translations of Parks's lyrics.<sup>8</sup> His conception of the album's cover featured a simple, color sketch of a mom-and-pop smile shop—actual cartoon smiles sitting in the shop windows while the owners, smiling also, look on from inside. A similar aesthetic was used in Holmes's illustration for the cover of the "Heroes and Villains" single; it paired a hero of exaggerated stature—Davy Crockett style—against a wily villain, drawn as a puddle on the floor of a Mexican cantina somewhere on the rough and ready western frontier.

As Capitol rallied to give *Smile* the marketing campaign *Pet Sounds* didn't have, Brian's work in the studio steadily inflated with grand production ideas that seemed to baffle as much as they showed his creative acuity. One of these was "The Elements," a conceptual supplement to the project's Americana theme, in which Brian planned to explore ideas about the four elements—earth, air, fire, water—through studio production. During the first of two sessions devoted to the "The Elements, Part One," the instrumental "Fire" section, Brian allowed a group of people to observe the proceedings. Approximately twelve musicians (mostly string

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<sup>8</sup> For more insight into the creative process behind the artwork produced for *Smile*, see Dominic Priore's interview with artist Frank Holmes in Priore 2005.

players) were gathered, along with studio engineer, Larry Levine, session contractor Diane Rovell, Van Dyke Parks, friend Danny Hutton, journalist Jules Siegel, and some anonymous others—more journalists, social adjuncts, all of them witnesses.

The creative task here was to capture, as persuasively as possible, the notion of fire *as recorded sound*. Working first with the musicians themselves (convinced by Brian to wear red plastic fireman's hats), Brian (wearing his own fireman's hat) taught them their parts. Then he worked from the studio control room, leading the group through twenty-four takes of organized noise, making adjustments here and there. The results took the observers by surprise. “[W]hat yankee ingenuity came from Brian Wilson when he presented in two hours time, those string parts that mystified people on the issue of fire” (quoted in McParland 2001, 118) explained Van Dyke. Others were just freaked out. “If you sat and you listened to it, you could close your eyes and visualize like you definitely knew there was a fire going on. I wouldn't call it pretty; it really signified that there was a fire there. It was scary,” was Diane Rovell's recollection (Quoted in Ibid.). When journalist Jules Siegel interviewed him shortly after the session, Brian himself appeared as unsettled by the recording as anyone else. “Yeah, I'm going to call this ‘Mrs. O'Leary's Fire’ and I think it might just scare a lot of people” (Quoted in Siegel). The title was another goof on American lore. It was a reference to the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871, when it was alleged that a nighttime conflagration that consumed approximately 1,687 acres of property, left three hundred dead, 100,000 without shelter, was started by a cow who kicked over a lantern in a barn owned by one Mrs. Patrick O'Leary in Chicago's West Division (Lowe 1979). Though it begins with the comical holler of fire alarms and burning crackles, what makes the production so unnerving is the way it goes from silliness, through cacophonous drums, serious fuzz bass, and into a musical imbroglio, as if dousing the fire or hurling oneself straight into the blaze would be equally reasonable responses.

While this recording showed his studio prowess, the same impulsive production approach lead Brian to other distractions, taking the focus off of *Smile*. The formation of Brother Records, conceived as a release valve for his creative whims, gave Brian the luxury to brainstorm ideas for vanity projects and execute

them without the anxiety of commercial expectations. The inanity of some of these projects was demonstrated by a series of sessions beginning in January 1967 that included a fellow named Jasper Dailey. Hired to document the *Smile* sessions under the suggestion of Brian's studio drummer, Hal Blaine, Dailey was taking photos when Brian convinced him to provide the vocals for several children's songs he had recently been toying with—"Teeter Totter Love," "Crack The Whip," and "When I Get Mad I Just Play My Drums." The sessions were nothing if not ludicrous. "One time Brian told me to go stand in front of the microphone and just say anything that came into my head," recalled Dailey (quoted in McParland 2001b, 123). "So I stood there for a good half-hour reeling off what I'd done that morning and the day before, and what I thought of the day's news and so on. Never heard the tape again" (quoted in *Ibid.*).

More sessions like these took place throughout the spring of 1967, giving prescient notification of where the *Smile* project was headed. The fragmentary recording method Brian used for "Good Vibrations" (assembling a recording from discretely produced stems) was compounded by the number of production ideas he considered for *Smile*. The project veered from its original course as Brian bounced from one session to another, from studio to studio, and it seemed there was any number of options for how the separate units could fit together coherently, either as individual songs or as a finished album.

As this weird mix of brilliance and disorder played out inside the recording studio, some watchers felt the music was evidence of a broader shift in pop. One of them was David Oppenheim, a television producer who happened to be in Los Angeles during this period to work on a television special commissioned by the CBS network examining the social dynamics of pop and its relationship to youth counterculture. Oppenheim was an older, accomplished fellow who did serious television journalism, winning awards for middlebrow documentaries on classical music figures like Igor Stravinsky and Pablo Casals. He made his acquaintance with the Beach Boys at late-November *Smile* session for a track called, "I'm In Great Shape," when Brian coaxed him to contribute some sound effects along with other studio visitors. Later, after several failed attempts to document the Beach Boys

working together in the studio, Oppenheim took his documentary cameras to Brian's Beverly Hills home to get some footage of him playing some of the *Smile* material alone at his grand piano.

Oppenheim's finished documentary, *Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution*, aired in the U.S. in April 1967 on the CBS network.<sup>9</sup> An advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* gave a thorough description of what the documentary featured:

The gulf between the generations never was so wide and nowhere quite so evident as in the pop music revolution. Tonight, in a CBS New Special, David Oppenheim views that revolution from both sides of the barrier of understanding that blocks most adults from the private world of the young. Composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein explores the anatomy of the new sound. Top performers like Herman's Hermits, Janis Ian, and Brian Wilson, leader of the Beach Boys, singing a new song, reveal pop's range and mood and impact. And youngsters on the pop scene help articulate their generation's view of our society and what they are reaching for in this new kind of music. A rare look at a fascinating world—that could be the world of tomorrow (April 25, 1967).

*Inside Pop* investigated a range of musicians and events that, taken together, appeared to be heralding a new era in popular music. David Oppenheim provided explanatory narration throughout the program, and, in a rather brilliant coup, Leonard Bernstein was featured for the first half-hour of the broadcast as an avowed ambassador of the classical music world. The documentary opened with Bernstein sitting opposite a young songwriter named Tandy Almer,<sup>10</sup> both of them discussing generational conflict. Bernstein acknowledged the terms of cultural conflict: "In addition to the age I represent, I represent a bourgeois family man; I represent an institution like the New York Philharmonic. I represent the establishment, if you wish. I hate that word, and I don't like to think of myself that way, but that's something that you would naturally rebel against." (*Inside Pop* Part 6, 0:24) The

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<sup>9</sup> See all six segments of "Inside Pop – The Rock Revolution (1967)," from a television documentary broadcast on CBS, April 25, 1967. YouTube.  
 Part 1 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSs1ca\\_\\_cRA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSs1ca__cRA) (9:01),  
 Part 2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5v1O1p94uR4> (9:01),  
 Part 3 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isl8MklxJOW> (9:01),  
 Part 4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxSha5StJW8> (9:01),  
 Part 5 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ubnrKyfQr8> (9:01),  
 Part 6 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9-waCF60GQ> (6:10) (accessed on June 14, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Almer was the songwriter behind the Association's 1966 breakout song "Along Comes Mary." He later contributed to the 1973 Beach Boys song "Sail On, Sailor."

program then featured Bernstein, this time alone, behind a piano, analyzing songs by the Beatles and Left Banke, talking about their “inventive” shifts in key and time signature, gushing about the deep meaning of it all:

I think it's all part of an historical revolution, one that has been going on for fifty years. Only now these young people have gotten control of a mass medium: the phonograph record. And the music on the records, with its noise and its cool messages may make us uneasy. But we must take it seriously as both a symptom and generator of this revolution. We must listen to it and to its makers, this new breed of young people with long hair and fanciful clothing. The rest of this program will be devoted to just that: getting to know them, seeing in them in action, and hearing their thoughts. Perhaps in learning about them, we can learn something about our own future. (*Inside Pop* Part 3, 4:22)

Progress was a key theme in Bernstein's observations. He explored the idea that pop music had, in the music of the Beatles and other groups, reached a level of sophistication and self-awareness that warranted comparison to composers like Bach and Schumann, while singers like Bob Dylan and Janis Ian demonstrated a new capacity in pop musicians to use their voices and lyrics as a form of social protest (“The lyrics of Bob Dylan alone would make a bombshell of a book about social criticism.” *Inside Pop* Part 3, 3:19). Bernstein exhorted viewers to take these developments seriously as evidence that pop was outgrowing its former self and into modes capable of grand artistry and social purpose. This was rock music.

The documentary then turned to an examination of the place of Los Angeles, where this musical coming-of-age was implicated in a conflict about public territory. “The music comes right out their world, and whatever is working on today's youth is working out in their music. And the crucible is Los Angeles,” said Oppenheim, over a shot of the Sunset Blvd. 8800 block street sign (*Inside Pop* Part 3, 6:26). He was referring to the ongoing skirmishes between local police and the young patrons of the music and dance clubs on Hollywood's Sunset Strip. Going back to September 1965, pressure from the local gentry, who felt the area had become overrun by rabble disturbing the peace and damaging property, led to an aggressive police crackdown on under-eighteen curfew violations. By summer 1966, establishments such as Stratford-on-Sunset, Fred C. Dobbs Café, and The Sea Witch were either forced to close their doors or suffered crippling losses after new strict curfew and car-parking policies barred their core teenage clientele from the Strip (*Los Angeles Times*, June 5,

1966). Along with the restrictions came a change in the Strip's personality. Jerry Lambert, owner of the Stratford-on-Sunset, told the *Los Angeles Times* it was teenagers who formed the core of his business, and that "The Strip was dead before the kids came" (Ibid.). By November, frustration had mounted and hundreds of teens took to the streets for a series of organized protests that led to brawls with police, some arrests, and general havoc.<sup>11</sup> Oppenheim's cameras happened to document some of these protests, along with conversations with key L.A. figures, like Frank Zappa, the Byrds' Jim McGuinn, journalist Paul Robbins, members of Canned Heat, Gentle Soul, UFO. Together with the Brian Wilson footage, all this material illustrated Bernstein's musicological ponderings with real-life examples.

What the *Inside Pop* documentary showed was that these musicians and young Sunset Strip protesters saw themselves as part of an extended social group with a shared, if vaguely articulated, cause. Interviews showed a general questioning of authority and a deeply felt sense of social mission. The Byrds' Jim McGuinn: "I think we're out there to break those barriers that we see to be arbitrary, the big fences that have been built, the walls that will crumble if you hit them hard enough" (*Inside Pop* Part 4, 2:17). An unnamed Sunset Strip protestor: "Why is it they can put down on our music? I mean, they say it's bad. They say it's a bunch of noise. 'Turn down the noise!' But is it really noise? Do they ever listen to the words?" (Ibid., 3:39). Canned Heat member Frank Cook: "Well, dig it, if, like, we could tell you verbally, there'd be no need for the music, would there?" (*Inside Pop* Part 3, 8:31). Journalist Paul Robbins: "See, we've given these kids a dream, which somebody gave to us, and it's called the American Dream. And we want nothing to do with it, except to talk about it. *We don't want it!*" (*Inside Pop* Part 4, 4:46). Frank Zappa: "I think that there's a revolution brewing, and it's going to be a sloppy one unless something is done to get it organized in a hurry" (*Inside Pop* Part 4, 4:56). Oppenheim's point was that the new strain of pop music could be intensely artistic and sophisticated on one hand, but that it could also bring about meaningful opposition to the establishment.

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, it was the right to dance that became a key issue in L.A. courts. After the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors moved to abolish all youth dance permits in unincorporated sections of the county (namely, the Strip) in early 1966, the owners of the Whisky à Go Go, the Strip's main draw, filed a countersuit to halt the enforcement of dance permit annulment ("Youths Go Where Action Is—Against Curfew" *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1966).

In the concluding segment, after the all the interviews, the program segued to shots of long-haired youths romping through a field in California—images of untainted glow removed from the urban turbulence at the Strip—and then cut to footage of Brian Wilson singing and playing piano in his Beverly Hills home. Oppenheim described the song as an inevitable spawn of musical and social awareness:

Here is a new song, too complex to get all of the first time around. It could come only out of the ferment that characterizes today's pop music scene. Brian Wilson, leader of the famous Beach Boys and one of today's most important pop musicians, sings his own "Surf's Up." Poetic, beautiful even in its obscurity, "Surf's Up" is one aspect of new things happening in pop music today. As such, it is a symbol of the change many of these young musicians see in our future (*Inside Pop* Part 6, 0:41, 2:28).

In context with the other musicians and footage stands out, Brian's appearance stands out, almost accidentally. Considering Brian went through months of second-guessing before "Good Vibrations" was deemed ready for public consumption, previewing an unfinished song was an unusual move. *Inside Pop* made no mention of the other elaborate studio production concepts he was working on, and Oppenheim recorded no interviews with Brian, Van Dyke, or any of the other Beach Boys expounding on the meaning of the rock revolution. Yet the sight and sound of Brian alone at the piano cut so romantic an image of a singing-songwriter, it easily absorbed Oppenheim's appraisal. The effect of this television appearance was that, like Tom Nolan's November 1966 article, it cast Brian as one of the elite musicians thought to be significant in the rock revolution of popular music.

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Approximately one year after Brian and Van Dyke started work on *Smile*, Derek Taylor announced in *Disc & Music Echo* that the new Beach Boys album had been indefinitely shelved: "In truth, every beautifully designed, finely-wrought inspirationally-welded piece of music made these last months by Brian and his Beach Boy craftsmen has been SCRAPPED. Not destroyed, but scrapped. For what Wilson seals in a can and destroys is scrapped,"(reprinted in Priore 1995). Even as it

encouraged fans to be patient, claiming that new music was inevitable, Taylor's statement was enigmatic.

Despite all the hype and scrambling for a place at the top of the pop hierarchy, *Smile* had, by the early months of 1967, become mired in a convoluted plot of missed deadlines, legal troubles, and general creative discord within the Beach Boys unit. "Heroes and Villains," the cornerstone of Brian and Van Dyke's conception of *Smile*, was to be released as a single in anticipation of the new album. One year after starting it, the song had become just one in a stockpile of productions waiting to be finished. The amount of studio work devoted to "Heroes and Villains" alone was enough to make the production of "Good Vibrations" appear amateur: the number of sessions numbered close to thirty, and Brian had yet to decide on a satisfactory way to piece it together. Then there was the official lawsuit filed against Capitol on February 28, 1967 in which the Beach Boys asked for \$250,000 in outstanding royalties and termination of the group's recording contract. Brian hired lawyer Nick Grillo, the same fellow included in the organizational development of Brother Records, to audit Capitol's books for suspected inconsistencies.<sup>12</sup> Frustrated by having to justify his lyrics to questioning members of the Beach Boys, Van Dyke exited the *Smile* sessions for the first time in March. Next came the public scandal of Carl Wilson's brief arrest in April for refusal to appear before a local draft board for compulsory induction into the U.S. armed forces, temporarily keeping the Beach Boys from an imminent European tour. In May, *Smile* appeared to be back on track when Brian organized several sessions for "I Love To Say Da Da," the water section of "The Elements," recording an instrumental backing track and a free-form vocalise. The last of these was cancelled without notice to the musicians, and it was the second time that month Brian failed to show for work. His reason for canceling the previous session: bad vibes.

The anxiety that took shape months earlier at the "Fire" session, spooking Brian as much as it spooked onlookers, terminated here as quiet relinquishment. It marked the last opportunity for Brian to adjudicate as leader of the *Smile* project. Out

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<sup>12</sup> For an interesting account of this litigation, in which it is claimed that the withholding of two recordings—"Heroes and Villains" and another song called "Vegetables"—were central to a Beach Boys/Brother Records plot to break free of Capitol's administrative leash, see Priore 2005.

of a year's worth of collaboration with Van Dyke and the massive amount of studio work collected on tape, these cancelled sessions spoke doubt. The suspicion that "genius" was perhaps too hefty a mantle finally breached all the public hype about the next big pop acquisition. *Smile* became a *non-album*.

Through the summer of 1967, while the Beach Boys struggled to find their musical bearings, their peers addressed themselves to the task of fusing music, art, and social cause. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released in the U.S. on June 2, transforming the Beatles from successful pop band into self-aware pop artists. In Northern California, a coalition of musicians led by John Phillips, of the Mamas and the Papas, and event promoters, Alan Paris and Ben Shapiro, organized a pop music festival to be held over one weekend in June (16-18) at the Monterey County Fairgrounds in Monterey. They called it the Monterey International Pop Festival, and they had big plans for it. "This will be the largest, most ambitious pop music event ever organized and its success can mean the triumph of art over money for a profit-spawned medium, the capping of a trend toward respectability which the field has been approaching for several years," reported Pete Johnson in the *Los Angeles Times* (June 4, 1967). As it happened, the Beach Boys were slotted as headliners for Saturday's show, and Brian Wilson was even included as a nominal member of the festival's board of governors, alongside Lou Adler, Donovan, Mick Jagger, Paul McCartney, Jim McGuinn, Terry Melcher, Andrew Oldham, Alan Paris, Johnny Rivers, John Phillips, Smokey Robinson, and Abraham Somer. Derek Taylor handled publicity. To demonstrate just how serious their commitment to the advancement of pop music was, acts would perform for free and all ticket proceeds would be hedged by an entity called the Foundation for "the granting of scholarships in music education, giving financial aid to needy performers, instituting classes in misunderstood and neglected pop music subjects (copyright laws, agency, songwriting, recording techniques, musical instruction and so on) and setting up other music festivals" (Ibid.). The board of governors had taken the communal attitude behind an event like the *T.A.M.I. Show* and reworked it toward a utopian cause.

An estimated 200,000 people gathered in Northern California to watch performances by the Who, the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Otis Redding, Ravi Shankar, Big Brother & The Holding Company, the Grateful Dead, the Mamas and the Papas, Buffalo Springfield, among numerous others. For reasons that remain unclear, Brian and the Beach Boys pulled out of the festival at the last minute. While the Summer of Love played out in Northern California, they spent it back in Los Angeles, regrouping.

The collection of recordings that would have made up *Smile*, as close to Brian and Van Dyke had planned it, passed from sight as the rest of the Beach Boys wrested the project for a complete overhaul. All recording was transplanted from the usual studios—Gold Star, Western, Columbia—to a studio set-up recently installed in Brian and wife Marilyn's new home in Bel Air. Carl, Dennis, Mike and Al played the instruments themselves. They produced stripped, radically altered versions of the original *Smile* material and a handful of new songs. A re-recorded version of "Heroes and Villains" was finally released as single on July 31, backed with "You're Welcome," a solo Brian Wilson chant left over from an obscure *Smile* session. With limited involvement from Brian, it took them one month to record an entire album. *Smiley Smile* was released on the Brother Records label on September 18, 1967 with little fanfare.

For all those journalists and fans anticipating a finished, grand work of art, *Smile*'s nonappearance was like a flagrant repudiation of shared ambition. Until it was announced that the project was scrapped, it looked unlikely that the project should be received as anything other than the Beach Boys' rightful passage from surf pop champions to authentic rock luminaries. Since that didn't happen, we can only guess what a finished *Smile* would have been.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On March 11, 2011, Capitol announced that a multi-CD boxed set devoted to *Smile*, similar to the 1996 *Pet Sounds Sessions*, would be released some time in late 2011. According to *Billboard*, this set, titled *The Smile Sessions*, will contain a 'finished' version of the album—with input from Brian and the rest of the band—culled from approximately 30 hours of the original *Smile* material, in addition to session outtakes ("Beach Boys' Lost 'Smile' Album to See Release in 2011," <http://www.billboard.com/news/beach-boys-lost-smile-album-to-see-release-1005070202.story#/news/beach-boys-lost-smile-album-to-see-release-1005070202.story>). Considering the wide array of available bootlegs and patchwork *Smile* material released officially across various Beach Boys albums from 1967 onwards, similar announcements made by Capitol since the mid-1990s, and the 2004 release *Brian Wilson presents SMiLE*, the merit of this set remains to be determined.

Though they had endured the reshuffling of pop expectations, the Beach Boys' most impressive achievement was that, in making records that romanticized sentiments of youth and place, they made authenticity a nonissue. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the trope of the California surfer. Though brother Dennis Wilson was the only member of the group with credible surfing experience, it was Brian, the non-surfer, who turned fantasies about surfing into hit records. The significance of those records wasn't their social realism but the way they captured gilded, bullish images of America and sold them well. If the fantasies reflected by those records had become corny by the time of *Smile*, negotiating the sentiments that powered them was central to Brian and Van Dyke's design. As a collection of partially constructed music and lyrics, *Smile* played out not towards the arrival of art but as a verdict on what pop music can do.

Which is to say, the point of that music was the way it played on its own contradictions. Among the music recorded for *Smile*, it was in the song "Surf's Up" that Brian and Van Dyke addressed these contradictions best, captured starkly in *Inside Pop* footage: Brian in his home, performing the song solo at the piano, like a seasoned classical performer, eyes closed. While the melodic lines seemed too broad, too delicate for a single, it was Van Dyke's lyrics that, out of all the allusive non-sequiturs and plays on American slang that went into *Smile*, thwarted profundity:

The diamond necklace played the pawn  
Hand in hand some drummed along  
To a handsome man and baton.

A blind class aristocracy  
Back through the opera glass, you see  
The pit and the pendulum drawn.

Columnated ruins domino.

[. . .]

Surf's up, aboard a tidal wave,  
Come about hard and join  
The young and often spring you gave.

Oppenheim ascribed the song's poetic and melodic beauty to the inevitable ferment of the "rock revolution," the fulfillment of a pure first cause. But the hilarious gall of the title passed him by. In naming it "Surf's Up," Brian and Van Dyke cheekily pushed familiar images of surfing, striped shirts, and Southern California itself back into the foreground. And what made those images so powerful in the first place was the way they made unreality *seem* real. They reflected just one kind of American aspiration, not America itself. They were part of an attitude set to music, which could then be used as music to power a way of seeing things. Maybe there is some kind of augury hidden in the words, "columnated ruins domino." Probably not. The value of "Surf's Up," like any of the group's early surf records, was how good Brian and the Beach Boys made *the idea* of surfing sound.

## Conclusion: Reflections on Rock History, Authenticity, and Beach Boys Mythology

They've been trying to get away from the beach, you know? They don't like their image. Even when I first ran into 'em I could never figure out why. What's wrong with it? Get 'em *down* to the beach. Put 'em into the trunks. The beach ain't bad.

--Van Dyke Parks, interviewed by Tom Nolan, *Rolling Stone* magazine, 1971

If there is such a thing as a baseline rock history narrative, writing it has mainly been the business of journalists and critics, not academics. With more success than other publications, *Rolling Stone* magazine has consistently articulated an understanding of this history for wide readership. Since Jann Wenner envisioned it in 1967 San Francisco—a time and place that represent the historical beacon of 1960s counterculture—*Rolling Stone* has documented rock culture well, chronicling the important events, experiences, and thoughts of the generation it represents. Over four decades, the publication synthesized these things with the right amount of leftist flavor and consciousness, providing a set of reference points and a discernable rock sensibility. In recent years, the magazine appears to have sloughed off interesting music criticism for bite-sized record reviews, increasing amounts of political grandstanding, and the canonization of figures and recordings that appear to embody the rock experience.

The magazine's lasting contribution to rock history, however, isn't the regular publication of its various lists of 'Best Albums' or '70 of Dylan's Best Songs', but that feature familiar to readers as the *Rolling Stone* Interview. A branded journalistic institution borrowed from *Playboy* magazine, yet founded on the idea that the intimate confessions of musicians (indeed, any public figure who fits the *Rolling Stone* ethos) should be central to an understanding of the rock experience, the *Rolling Stone* Interview persists as a path to insight. By obtaining admission to the lives behind the public glamour—John and Yoko, Kurt Cobain, Radiohead, whatever portrait of rumination makes the cover—the journalist as confessor, as our watchful eyes and ears, discovers hitherto unrevealed truths about the personalities and stories

behind the music. The *Rolling Stone* Interview is a great purveyor of that elusive quality of authenticity.

As a standard bearer for taking the music seriously, authenticity is a dominant theme in both non-academic and academic historical accounts of popular music. It is a beastly concept that taps deep Western cultural beliefs about the individual self, art and creativity (Gracyk 1996; Mason 2003; Pope 2005). Canadian scholar Keir Keightley has written astutely about the concept of authenticity, its place in both academic and non-academic historical accounts of popular music, and how it works especially as an organizing principle in conventional accounts of rock. By emphasizing elements of individual autonomy and creative authorship under a rubric of authenticity, the model rock history, Keightley argues, will frame key events and figures in terms of pure origin (2001, 2010). The gist of the conventional narrative is that it explains emergence, development, and popularization over time using an entrenched “rhetoric of degeneration” (Jarrett 1992, 168), always working outwards from a context of noble birth towards inauthentic states of musical value. One strength of this kind of narrative is that its plot fits a familiar cultural logic where, out of uncorrupted Edens of music making, the difference between heroes and villains—the true artist and the sell-out—is all too apparent.

The problem with the ‘authentic’/‘inauthentic’ binary is that it promotes a warped view of creative ambition and success while claiming a kind of musical essentialism. It also muddles a valuable function of origin stories, which isn’t the safeguarding of truth but to show how ‘truth’ is produced. If the academic study of rock history is to depend on the empirical research and investigation of an array of information—archives, interviews, criticism, the recorded music itself, performance footage, rock biographies—to properly historicize events, figures, and ideas, it cannot dispense with the myths by which rock narratives are meaningfully organized. A useful task for the popular music scholar is to consider not simply whether one account gets closer to the authentic truth than another, but how, through the co-optation, shaping, and mythologizing of information, authenticity becomes relevant in the first place.

Chief among the reasons why the story of the Beach Boys interests me is that the group emerged and became central players during a period in American popular

music the account of which has been pivotal to our understanding of rock history. This period is commonly framed as a time when the aesthetic codes of 1950s rock 'n' roll were temporarily displaced by the rise of sounds and performers that reflected the hierarchical, industry-based values of an expanding pop economy at the turn of the decade. The ensuing professionalized production of streamlined pop is understood as a threat to the legacy of authentic rock 'n' roll values (Clarke 1995, Garofalo 2002, Landau 1968, Ward 1986). Beginning at the moment when all that was spontaneous, below-the-waist, and maverick about the music receded as leading figures stepped back from their stations to wander in a wilderness of musical slump, these were dispiriting times, indeed: Elvis Presley enlisted in the armed forces, was eventually discharged, and started making bad movies; Chuck Berry's imprisonment for transporting a minor across state lines was a comment on both his race and his music; and the public demise of rabble-rouser radio DJ Alan Freed on behalf of a Legislative Oversight Subcommittee of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce investigation into pay-for-play practices demonstrated exactly just what square, adult society thought about rock 'n' roll's corruptive influence on young people. What happened to the vital energy of 1950s rock 'n' roll as it faced an expanding pop economy? What happened to authenticity?

The spaces left by rock 'n' roll's decline then open up to what is written into the histories as an odd mixture of bland pop sounds and performers that exhibit little if any of the same musical vitality that preceded them. A concise account of this transitional period can be found in Mark Sten's chapter in *Rock Almanac: Top Twenty American and British Singles and Albums of the '50s, '60s and '70s*, titled "The In-Between Years (1958-1963)." After giving a detailed critical assessment of stylistic developments in this period, Sten lays out the stakes of rock's "in-between years" from a big picture perspective:

The rock band represents autonomy—the idea of a small, self-contained, self-sufficient co-operative musical unit separate from and independent of the outside world. When the '60s got out of hand and generational warfare broke out, the band proved an ideal vehicle for wresting artistic (if not financial) control from industry executives, who tended to take a dim view of the gathering madness championed by so many of their acts. The prototypical rock band displays three primary characteristics: it plays its own instruments, it writes its own music, and it projects the image of a group. These

characteristics first appeared with the Four Seasons and then with the Beach Boys in 1962-1963. The careers of these two seminal bands flourished through the British Invasion of 1964, as did those of some late-blooming girl groups, the Motown stable, and some early-'60s heavies: Mary Wells, the Righteous Brothers, and Roy Orbison; the invasion did not in fact cut down American artists still capable of growth. (1978, 74)

What recuperated authentic rock ‘n’ roll values from cold storage, then, was the emergence of groups who were seen to embody sentient, artistic, vaguely political voices in opposition to the oppressive hierarchy of an adult-identified pop industry.

Yet whatever a band like the Beach Boys gained in terms of creative autonomy during this period was superseded by other cultural phenomena (Sten uses the term ‘rock’ as a catch-all to include music of the pre-rock era):

A nascent counterculture existed in the United States by the early 1960s: budding freaks and a dawning youth movement focused then, as later, around political radicalism, a permissive life-style, and drugs. By and large, rock was poorly received by this vanguard, which gravitated instead to the acoustic message music of the period. Rock was insufficiently thoughtful, it lacked seriousness, it wasn't committed: Spector women never sang about important stuff like civil rights and nuclear disarmament. Certain social divisions, since blurred, were new then, more intense and sharply felt, and the Four Seasons with their greasy adenoidal love songs must have looked like one more sick permutation of mainstream American values to the folkies, already caught up in a developing ethos of rebellion. And the Beach Boys, with their enthusiastic celebration of a politically unconscious youth culture . . . hot rods and surfing were one thing, but with "Be True to Your School" the Klean Kut Kar Krazy Kalifornia Kwintet finally came out and said it, embracing the high school status quo and generally coming off as mindless hedonistic reactionaries.

Well, shit, it mattered to me. (Ibid., 75)

Such an explanation is difficult to unscramble. In one sense, Sten’s account duly follows rock orthodoxy—masking issues of taste in a language of ethical requirements, often from the privileged perspective of someone who ‘lived it’. The “in-between years” assessment is significant not because it is correct or incorrect but because of its ideological assumptions. This was a period when the pop marketplace aligned squarely with the demographic bulge of the post-war baby boom to welcome a Top-40-based business thought that in turn led to the rise of the twist (a dance so

inoffensive, parents could do it) and pretty boy teen idols like Frankie Avalon and Fabian. Performers in this vein most egregiously represent what rock critic Jon Landau has referred to as “the worst kind of rot imaginable” that American pop music had to offer during this period (1972, 131). If we are to follow the drift of this narrative, the biggest problem of this transitional “schlock” is that it wasn’t received the way rock ‘n’ roll was received. That is to say, it failed to convey a unified sense of cause (youth rebellion) or personality (it all sounded the same) (Garofalo, 2002).

But it was also this Top-40 sensibility that highlighted an expanding interest in studio production craft and key hubs of innovative pop music activity, such as Berry Gordy’s Motown in Detroit, New York City’s Brill Building with its songwriting teams (Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Gerry Goffin and Carol King, among many others), and the looming achievements of producer Phil Spector, who shuttled back and forth between coasts before establishing himself in Los Angeles. Further, this was also the period that saw the stateside arrival of the Beatles, whose success in America was so massive and complete, it not only spearheaded an influx of other British personalities, it is commonly received as the event that all but single-handedly resuscitated rock ‘n’ roll from general musical torpor, effectively marking the end of the “in-between years” (even shaking the country out of the haze that followed the grisly assassination of president John F. Kennedy in November 1963) (MacDonald 1998, Inglis 2002, Wald 2009). Hence, the Beach Boys bloomed in an otherwise stifling pop milieu, and, ironically, in the face of the encroaching British cohort, but, alas, a failure to incorporate countercultural “seriousness” and commitment (qualities so often taken for granted in rock history) into their music derailed fulfillment of nobility.

Behind this account lies a central puzzle of the rock concept—how make a distinction between the socio-cultural and aesthetic aspects of the music. One of the more interesting academic debates on this issue can be found in the January-February 1970 issue of *New Left Review*. In one corner, critic Andrew Chester argues for a unified aesthetics of rock, asking us to consider the task of advancing “a set of first-order concepts that come to grips with the internal structure of rock music itself” (87). The problem for him is what he describes as a kind of pop mystification, a tendency for rock writers and historians to mark the social aspects around the music

with a significance and meaning that supersedes experience of the music as music. “[T]he rock idols of the ‘fifties, ‘highschool [sic], ‘folk’, California, Motown, the British groups, acid-rock, underground” are some examples of what Chester meant: they offer a set of material different to a conscious ordering of aesthetic principles internal to the music itself (83). In the other corner, Andrew Merton responds to Chester by questioning what he calls a “Platonic-Crocean belief in the work of art as an intuitive-expressive unity” (91). He argues instead for an aesthetic framework in which musical constructs are essentially multiple and dissociable.

On the state of American rock music in 1970, Merton interestingly contrasts the historical and aesthetic influences of Bob Dylan and the Beach Boys. The achievements of Dylan are duly noted, but, as Merton argues, his work also flipped an understanding of ‘authentic’ musical experience. Dylan’s songs register a tangling of musical origins in which the experience of a folk community happens not in a rural or poor context but in the context of a middle class, university population (95). Though Merton doesn’t specifically frame the Beach Boys’ music in terms of an ‘in-between’ period, he contrasts their musical impact against Dylan’s in a way that nevertheless conflates aesthetic judgment with political injunction:

By contrast, orthodox critics have generally ignored such truly great predecessors of Art Rock as Brian Wilson. Understandably. If Dylan is false poetry, the Beach Boys are the poetry of the false. All the difference between good and bad art is there. Marx said that religion was the ‘soul of soulless world’: the alloyed, computed sounds of the Beach Boys (or in another dimension of the Supremes and Tamla [Motown]) are the soullessness of a soulful world. The mechanical, serial, recurrent universe of US capitalism is reflected back, not in a spiritualization which laments or denies (comforts/conceals) it, but in an exaltation which mirrors (defines/reveals) it. Imperialism has every need of a sentimental ‘soul’ as consolation for its victims [. ] (95)

From the perspective of rockist criticism, the “in-between years” are a mess. They both contextualize the birth of a new rank of autonomous musical personalities and represent a crucible that sucked a diverse set of figures into an ideological quandary.

Some historical perspective is helpful here. It is clear that the middle-class, suburban genesis of the Beach Boys' music and their entrance into the early-1960s mainstream pop industry followed a *Billboard* chart-based, pop sensibility. This entailed both focused marketing and the rapid succession of recordings that aligned squarely with commercial expectations. In terms of marketability, writer Nick Cohn understood that the allure of the group's early records was the way they purveyed self-assurance: "All you had to do was throw in the right words, wipe-out and woody and custom machine, and you were home. Californians bought you out of patriotism and everyone else bought you for escape. The more golden your visions, the more golden your sound, the better you sold. It was almost that simple" (2004, 95). This music also played out at a time in post-WWII American society when, following the rise of radio, film, and television, the lag between mainstream culture and counterculture was decreasing (Marcus 2004, "Squaresville U.S.A. vs. Beatsville" *Life* September 21, 1959). While proponents of authenticity will argue that mass mediation contradicts the integrity of a cause, it is worth considering that, in a pluralistic pop economy of images, sounds, and styles, the counterculture matured, and endures, mainly through the reach of mass media.

One powerful way it does this is through advertising, a profession where art and commerce, conformity and non-conformity, are at their most contentious *and* productive. Though rock ideology tends to conceal the processes of mediation, it is interesting that the history of American mass media can also be seen as a history of creative advertising. As cultural historian Thomas Frank persuasively demonstrates in his rigorous study of the post-WWII rise of creative advertising in America, *The Conquest of Cool* (1997), the rise of cultural counter-step in the '60s had more in come with the creative processes and valuations of Madison Avenue than history typically tells us. Tracing the work of the eminent advertising executive, William Bernbach, Frank accounts for a radical reshuffling of business thought, beginning with the establishment of the Manhattan firm, Doyle Dane Bernbach, in 1949, that rippled through the flow of post-WWII American consumerism. By rejecting the restrictive rules of empirical market research and emphasizing creativity and nonconformity above all else, the power of Bernbach's business philosophy [captured in one of the many aphorisms he was known for: "Logic and analysis can

immobilize and sterilize an idea. It's like love—the more you analyze it the faster it disappears” (Quoted in Frank 1997, 57)] was that it laid the conceptual, facilitatory groundwork for the mass dissemination of the '60s counterculture. In pursuit of individuality apart from traditional, Puritan values, Bernbach's paradigm—selling stories about products, not products themselves—claimed that there was no difference between the businessman and the hippy.

In this sense, Dr. Timothy Leary's drop out philosophy seems less like revolutionary proposition and more like a credulous permutation of what the advertising world had been professing for years, internalized, and then hurled back into the mainstream like a freestanding religious sect from Northern California. Further, the 1967 summer of love and the 1969 Woodstock festival appear less like pure expressions of community spirit and more like late arrivals to the countercultural cause. Ironically, the legacy of these idealized historical events is detectable today mostly as a merchandising brand of rock nostalgia—endless supplies of Hendrix t-shirts, Carlos Santana-endorsed Paul Reed Smith guitars, Woodstock '94, and (what did Altamont teach us?) Woodstock '99.

I have highlighted aspects of aesthetics *and* commercialism as directly related themes throughout this Beach Boys story in order to demonstrate that the 'authentic'/'inauthentic' binary is simply too restricting as a narrative framework. It explains the historical development of music by conceiving of the process in a derivative sense—always beginning from mystified, non-commercial origins, moving to states of lesser vitality, yet never really getting *anywhere* without a market. The problem with this conception is that it doesn't sufficiently account for the complexities of the central players in this narrative. To overlook the commercial success of Dylan or the Beatles, for example, is to miss the way that aspect of their work influenced the course and relevance of their musical reach. Conversely, to overlook the artistic and aesthetic issues involved the earlier and overlapping work of figures like Spector or the Beach Boys because it lacked sufficient political edge is to take a rather parochial view of their music. If rock's historical achievement was the ability to cast off worn conventions of pop sense, its assertions of countercultural action say more about convention than pop sense itself.

In contrast to the dominant account of the ‘in-between years’, I have tried to construct a narrative in which the musical developments of this period reflect a process of acquisition and incorporation. Another way of telling the story is to see the development of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys in terms of convergence. Here the music shares telling commonalities with older pop music practices and sensibilities that are strikingly at odds with the claims of rock history that tend to reinforce an idealized picture of the late-1960s glory days at the expense of what came before and after it. An alternative way to think of the story is in terms of accretion, where musical development (a thoroughly contradictory process of imitation, reworking, cancellation, invention, accident, competition) registers an effective *gain* of something—namely, fresh paths to meaning and pleasure, and new entries to a particular experience of public life.

Such a claim has peculiar resonance in the United States, where the relationship between geographical breadth and collective experience implies gain *and* loss in grand measure. A vital aspect of American culture is the way it is thrashed out between questions of personal and shared history and a determined faith in forward movement. Yet having to choose between noble isolation and the lowest common denominator of a massed public is to misunderstand a central theme of the American story, which is the shucking off of ties to the past while striving toward an approximation in the present (Turner [1920] 1997; Leland 2004, 2007). We like the idea that, whatever our current acquisitions, we retain the option to take to the open road in pursuit of somewhere other than here, to start anew. This is best experienced in the public domain of popular culture, where information and style share an equal foothold in the pursuit of access and autonomy.

And, of course, the Beach Boys’ music draws from a vital stock of American imagery whose power is based precisely on the idea that the road to somewhere is paved with inauthenticity. Going back to the 1890s, Southern California boosterism (indeed, the state’s own advertising campaign) has turned on notions of salutary weather and a prefabricated Utopia at the coastal edge of American westward expansion: metropolitan Los Angeles. The line that runs through its cultural industries and institutions—from its literary tradition, Hollywood, radio, and television to urban sprawl, aerospace engineering, and proximity to Disneyland; from

porn and L. Ron Hubbard to a heightened awareness of physical health and beauty—defines a mythos of personal reinvention and the reimagining of America’s Puritan heritage (Starr 1985, 2009). Los Angeles is known as a place where one goes to experience idyllic possibilities and glimpse the future by navigating a topography where personal history and cultural inheritance are best seen in the rear-view mirror of an automobile (Banham 1973, Rieff 1992, Ulin and Starr 2010). Yet cracks in the glass inevitably reveal themselves, alas, giving way to skepticism and the disillusion of noir. Los Angeles is also known for its smog, disconnectedness, wearied Hollywood scuzz, and acute racial tension (Davis 1998). But even in a country whose popular culture, as John Leland argues, “begins in the mongrel, not the Platonic” (2004, 133), the lure of L.A. is that it provides a unique place for the co-existence of radical, conventional, and open-ended ways of being. That Beach Boy Dennis Wilson would, at some point in the late ‘60s, be enchanted and then disillusioned by a man named Charles Manson—“You see, when I knew Manson, it was no big thing. We were friends; we lived together. That was long before the murders. And we’d talk every night, just like you and me. We’d really talk about important things” (Quoted in Leaf 1985, 136)—is no less fitting than it is chilling. For all its glow and madness, Los Angeles, California, is a place where authenticity is turned on its head.

What is really at stake in the Beach Boys’ story is the intertwining of myths. On one level, they were simple guys from the simple place of Hawthorne, California. A city in Los Angeles County, located about midway between the coastline on the west and the bustle of Hollywood to the north, the milieu of post-WWII suburban Hawthorne was dominated by conventionality. The white middle-class-ness of the Wilson home reflects the banality of American affluence (and knotty themes of dramatic familial conflict), where the acquisition of worldly sophistication and cultural awareness tend to be more of a personal achievement than a shared expectation, all too clearly. The Beach Boys’ music funnels this suburban consciousness through an identifiably Southern California topography, attitude, and aspiration, compelling their audience to find their own versions of the conceit. Images projected by songs like “Be True To Your School,” “I Get Around,” or “Surfin’ Safari” do not authentically represent anything except an abstracted sense of place. Through variance, they add to musical occasion.

By amplifying grander themes of reinvention and imagination, the Southern California mythos also provides a bigger framework. The Beach Boys' music appeals not by any sense of aloof, hip correctness, but through a lack of skepticism. During one *Pet Sounds* session, Brian offhandedly ran an idea past studio engineer Chuck Britz. "Hey, Chuck, is it possible we could bring a horse in here, if we, you know, don't screw anything up?" Brian asked. "I *beg* your pardon?" rejoined Britz, obviously taken aback. Without pause, without bullshit, Brian pressed him further, "Honest to God, the horse is tame and everything" ("Dog Barking Sessions" *Pet Sounds Sessions* Disc 3). Here, it's not the wackiness of Brian's question that stands out, but the surprise in Britz's tone, as if a live horse *couldn't* contribute to the recording session. It was this sort of conviction, matter-of-fact and apparent, that contributed to a lapse in the Beach Boys' musical composure in the following years; but what matters is that they had already parlayed it into a branded pop sensibility. Their 1965 hit single, "California Girls," affirms it best. Amid a swirl of instrumental arrangement and vocal harmonies, the refrain, "I wish they all could be California girls," is as easily lacking in doubt as it is chauvinist; and the desire to reimagine the globe in the image of the Golden State endures.

## Appendix: Notes on Method and Sources

Because this thesis combines cultural historical narrative with elements of rock writing, it necessarily draws on the methods of both.

The initial task was to place relevant figures and events within a historical framework. Due to varying degrees of accessibility, working my way through print and digital archives was a continuous, and sometimes improvisational, process. I spent several days in London, on two separate occasions (November 2008, March 2009), cramped in the vaults of Rock's Backpages, digging through their extensive collection of rock journalism and *Billboard*, and at the British Library, consulting their holdings of *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker*. The National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh gave me dependable access to older monographs, weighty history tomes, and other obscure literature that, over the long haul, proved critical my thought process.

During annual visits to my home in west Texas, I spent many hours in the media and microfilm department of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) library conducting the bulk of latter-stage research. UTEP's comprehensive digital archive of the *Los Angeles Times* and their microfilmed collection of *Los Angeles Free Press*, *Oracle*, *Provo* and *Pop-See-Cul* provided much-needed, non-rock biography perspective, while their solid cache of American magazines such as *Life*, *Esquire*, *Time*, and others, enabled me to cross-check familiar historical references and locate relevant articles.

There was one specific publication that eluded me. References to *TeenSet*, a pop magazine published by Capitol Records in the early 1960s, particularly a series of exclusive interviews conducted by journalist Earl Leaf circa 1964-1965, abound in nearly all the good Beach Boys biographies I know of. After contacting three authorities in this area and following what seemed like promising leads to Suzy Shaw, head of Bomp! Records, and Rex Donati, archivist at Capitol Records, both in Los Angeles, I remain doubtful that a centralized collection of this magazine exists (and continue to wonder how writers who claim knowledge of it couldn't confirm where it should be located). In the end, I managed to secure two individual issues of

*TeenSet* (February 1966, April 1967) from eBay. The promotional strategies and pre-rock era writings documented in them only convince me that a comprehensive examination could offer much more to popular music researchers.

In constructing the narrative, I began with the assumption that to engage subject matter meaningfully, to explore the relationship between sounds, images, and stories, also entails my own responses to them. The music of the Beach Boys and other relevant figures (the Beatles, Dylan, Spector, etc.)—comprised of official and unofficial record releases, studio session outtakes, recorded live performances, television and movie appearances—was my guide at all times.

No historical narrative can convey events of the past with empirical purity, and this one certainly does not do that. For someone who can't remember a time before *Thriller*, *Purple Rain*, and the launch of MTV, my thoughts on the music do not conform to familiar 'I was there' rock critic mindset. Rather, I relied on historical documentation and fact as a schematic plan for exploring various aspects of the music and vice versa.

Until very recently, knowledge of 1964's *T.A.M.I. Show* was limited to passing references in rock history texts and obscure, poor quality VHS and VHS-to-DVD transfer bootlegs. Shout! Factory changed all this in March 2010 when they released a complete, remastered, DVD edition. More so than any other source of documented information I consulted, this concert movie best encapsulates the spirit of the so-called 'in-between' years with focus and care. Footage of 1965's *The Big T.N.T. Show* is available freely on the Internet and hard-to-find, slapdash VHS and DVD bootlegs; I relied on a DVD bootleg from eBay.

With the support of the University of Edinburgh Music Department, I made a research trip to Los Angeles, California in late August 2009. Over a whirlwind four-day visit, the objectives were to grab as much information as possible from archival holdings of *TeenSet* at either Bomp! Records or Capitol, locate and inspect sites relevant to my research (i.e., Sunset Boulevard, Venice, Los Angeles suburbs), and interview Van Dyke Parks at his Pasadena home. Of these, only the first yielded little results, except, as I mentioned, for the knowledge that *TeenSet* magazine remains largely beyond public reach. Fortunately, my interview with Mr. Parks did not go according to plan. In spite of my carefully crafted list of questions, he seemed more

interested in reflecting on a variety of themes and ideas that, for the sake of my narrative, turned out to be more urgent than the catalogue of elusive facts I was after. For what felt like the quickest two hours I spent in L.A., I listened closely, interrupting only to ask for elaboration on the information I found interesting or unexpected.

Of the biographies, Timothy White's *The Nearest Faraway Place: Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys and the Southern California Experience* (1995) is perhaps the most ambitious in terms of scope and rigor, intertwining the dramatic personal lives of the Wilson clan into a dramatization of Southern California history. For its thoughtful emphasis on the music (though clouded at times by a dogged intention to redeem the group from their late-'70s wilderness period) and a good collection of photos, David Leaf's *The Beach Boys and the California Myth* (1985 edition) remains the first and last word on Brian Wilson as artistic genius. Our current understanding of *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* is directly traceable to Leaf's framing of the key creative issues. Byron Preiss's *The Beach Boys* (1983 edition) is worth mentioning mostly because it is the premier authorized biography and contains a vast selection of interesting quotes and observations—the conceptual seeds explored with more sophistication by subsequent biographers.

There are multiple reference books by independent researchers, each making a vast amount of Beach Boys information easily accessible to fellow researchers. Brad Elliot's *Surf's Up!* (2003 edition) successfully compiles all known Beach Boys and Beach Boys-related recordings, and arranges them by various criteria, into a single convenient source. Australian-based researcher Stephen J. McParland has published a set of concise works under the title, "Surf 'N' Rock Reference Series." For their detailed presentation of American Federation of Musicians recording session logs and detailed interviews with obscure L.A. session musicians/studio upstarts, McParland's *In the Studio with Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys: Our Favourite Recording Sessions: a look at various recording sessions of the Beach Boys, 1961-1970* (2002) and *Bull Sessions with the Big Daddy: interviews with those who helped shape the California sound* (2001) are gold mines of insight and useful anecdotes. Keith Badman's ambitious *The Beach Boys: The Definitive Diary of America's Greatest Band On Stage And In The Studio* (2004) augments Elliot and

McParland with extensive details about tours, television and movie appearances, and artfully selected photographs, from 1961 through 1976.

To work out the *Pet Sounds*/"Good Vibrations"/*Smile* period, I began with the available recordings. Starting points were Capitol's *Good Vibrations: Thirty Years of the Beach Boys* (1993) and *The Pet Sounds Sessions* (1996) CD boxed sets. The former contains a rather limited set of previously unreleased material from the *Smile* sessions that, for its clarity, warrants repeated listening. For its documentation of Brian's studio banter with session musicians in-between takes, and clear organization, *The Pet Sounds* boxed set gives valuable insight into the creative mood behind that album. Charles Granata's *I Just Wasn't Made For These Times: Brian Wilson and the Making of Pet Sounds* (2003) complements the boxed set with a balanced offering of original interviews and critical musings. The 1999 Sea of Tunes bootleg releases, *Unsurpassed Masters Volume 15: Good Vibrations*, *Volume 16: Smile*, and *Volume 17: Smile Sessions* exhaustively cover the various twists and turns of this period and, taken together, effectively convey the radical extent of Brian's musical curiosity in a non-commercial light.

Sifting through the literature on *Smile* can be overwhelming. For the purposes of this project, I wasn't interested in constructing an ideal conception of what a finished *Smile* would have been but in exploring the attitudes that informed its recording. Much of what we know about the album can be attributed to Dominic Priore's seminal *Dumb Angel Gazette Vol. 2: Look! Listen! Vibrate! Smile!* (1995 edition). Priore's text pulls together a massive quantity of newspaper reports, Derek Taylor writings, and other journalistic coverage from the period, including Jules Siegel's October 1967 *Cheetah* article, "Goodbye Surfing Hello God!," the first thoughtful journalistic attempt to thrash out the meaning of *Smile*'s incompleteness. To Priore's credit, the majority of this material is unavailable anywhere else, but his decision to present it in the form of a 'zine-inspired 'scrapbook' frustratingly detracts from its usefulness; to locate dates of newspaper and magazine clippings or follow a consistent thematic or chronological flow is to get mired in its contrived punk aesthetic. Priore's 2005 work, *The Story of Brian Wilson's Lost Masterpiece Smile*, though drawing from his sufficient observations and insights as a longstanding L.A. scenester, similarly suffers, but this time from an obscured methodology. He clearly

interviewed key players and quotes from newspapers and trade magazines, but without an adequate bibliography, for example, some of his otherwise interesting claims are practically impossible to trace. Larry Starr's 1994 article "The Shadow Of A Smile: The Beach Boys Album That Refused To Die," from *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 6:1, successfully handles the creative and aesthetic puzzles of *Smile* from an academic perspective, and, together with his follow-up 2004 review of *Brian Wilson presents SMiLE* for *Journal for the Society for American Music* (May), presents a useful way to think about the album's aesthetic architecture. The definitive *Smile* story is yet to be written.

The early 1960s Southern California world of youth, sun, sand, and surf is still accessible through popular films of the period. For all their capacity to entertain, Columbia's *Gidget* (1959), directed by Paul Wendkos, and Bruce Browne's one-of-a-kind surf documentary *The Endless Summer* (1964) can also be watched as commentaries on surf as counterculture. American International Pictures' *Beach Party!*, *Bikini Beach* and *Muscle Beach Party* still work surprisingly well for the ham-handed b-studio productions they are. For that reason, and for footage that includes Dick Dale, dancer Candy Johnson, and Little Stevie Wonder, they capture Southern California mindset with an identifiable style and sense of humor. The common thread running through all these pictures is legendary surfer Miki Dora, who works mainly as a surf stunt performer but also as an extra in certain party scenes. To augment the films, Brian Chidester and Dominic Priore's tasteful *Pop Surf Culture* (2008) gives a fresh perspective on the intertwining mainstream and countercultural strains of Southern California's surf history. Moving through a vast arrangement of photographs, recorded music, movies, magazines and other ephemera, this arty book works like a companion piece to a thoughtfully curated museum exhibit. Kirse Granat May's *Golden State, Golden Youth* (2002), for its focused research on the image of California in popular culture, and Bruce Golden's *Southern California Pastoral* ([1976] 1991), for its original spin on the Beach Boys' contribution to the California mythos, are two monographs definitely worth consulting.

Reyner Banham's 1973 study, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, was my starting point for thinking about Los Angeles as both a place and an idea. Banham's background as an architect and his mapping of areas according to

various architectural styles offers a unique way of thinking about L.A.'s otherwise notorious urban sprawl. *City of Quartz: Excavating The Future In Los Angeles* (1998) by Mike Davis, and *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World* (1992) by David Rieff can be read as complementary pieces that explore key aspects of L.A.'s sunshine/noir dichotomy. *Los Angeles: Portrait of a City* (2010) is a rich history told through vivid historical photos, compiled by Jim Heimann, and concise essays by renowned California historian Kevin Starr. Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* (1972) remains the definitive history of old Hollywood, told through scandal, gossip, and black and white photography.

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