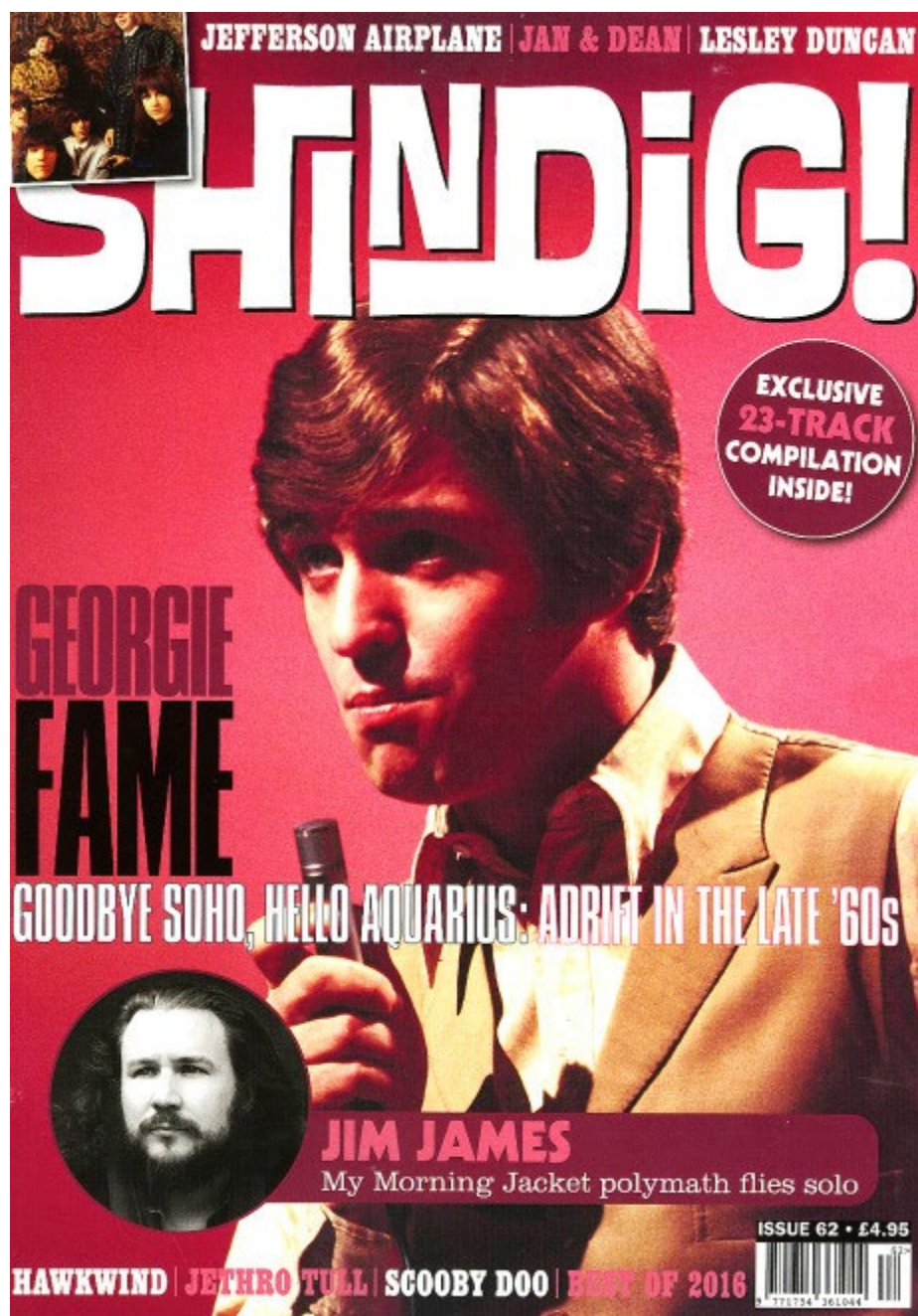


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Surf's Ups & Downs

*From Jan Berry's original studio garage, and in vintage and recent interviews with Dean Torrence, Glen Campbell, Wrecking Crew drummer Hal Blaine and Berry biographer Mark A. Moore, **Scott Paton** pieces together the lost Sunshine Pop chapter in the tragic and triumphal saga of '60s hit-makers Jan & Dean*



January 1977. It's an unusually hot winter's day, even for Los Angeles. This is the kind of weather that spurred California dreamers' westward migration in the 1800s and continues to this day. As I wind through the hills of Bel Air—a slightly more bucolic haven for the wealthy than the adjacent, manicured Beverly Hills—I am frantically searching for 1111 Linda Flora Drive, the home of Jan Berry—the former leader of '50s doo wop-cum-'60s surf music duo Jan & Dean. In this primitive, pre-smart phone era, one must rely on one's wits or a street map to navigate a lush, hilly labyrinth such as this, and at this particular moment, I am short on both.



Arranged by Berry's former partner, Dean Torrence, I'm en route to my first meeting with Jan, ostensibly to do an interview. His having suffered significant brain damage and partial paralysis from a near-fatal and career-ending auto accident a decade earlier, I'm unsure of what to expect—an anxiety compounded by the fact that I am now 15 minutes late for my appointment with him.

But as I round a bend, I see a wiry-haired fellow with a distinctive gait struggling to the top of a steep driveway. I pull alongside of him, roll down the window and he says with a beaming smile, "Scott? Hi, I'm Jan Berry."



He instructs me to park in front of the house next to his car—easily identified by the license plate with the vanity ID, “1 Jan 1.” Now embarrassed not only by my late arrival, but by the fact that I didn’t think to give him a lift down the driveway, I launch into a litany of apologies as he approaches. With an ear-to-ear grin still affixed to his face, he says, “Don’t be silly! Hey! I want to show you the apartment I’m going to get in Westwood by UCLA. I’m too old to live with my parents. Come on, we’ll take my car.”

Just moments after my climb to this mountaintop aerie over-looking West Los Angeles –with distant views south to downtown L.A. and west out on to the Pacific Ocean—I am descending at a rapid rate of speed through countless blind, hairpin turns, chauffeured by a 35-year-old with one good arm and leg. I am a little uneasy at best. After all, this is the fellow who nearly died behind the wheel in April 1966 while careening recklessly in his Corvette Stingray. The site of that accident is just a couple miles away, a scene eerily foreshadowed in Jan & Dean’s 1965 hit, “Deadman’s Curve.”

My terror is compounded when he removes that one arm from the wheel to place a “Jan & Dean’s Greatest Hits” cassette into his dashboard player. Jan wants to educate me on their discography. I assure him that I am well-versed in their catalog, and shouldn’t he *really* keep his hand on the steering wheel? He simply laughs and says, “I won’t kill ya!”



As we wind down further to the base of the hill and Sunset Boulevard, he begins to sing along to the tunes on the tape, most of which he co-wrote and produced himself back in the duo’s heyday. His vocals are halting, and Jan mangles much of the lyrics, but he is completely unselfconscious. I begin to sing along, taking either Jan’s bass part or Dean’s falsetto. “Hey, pretty good!” he encourages.

Just before we exit Bel Air and cross Sunset into Westwood, a vintage, wood-paneled Ford wagon approaches and passes us. It's the identical vehicle referenced in Jan & Dean's sole chart-topper, "Surf City." *"I bought a '34 wagon and we call it a Woodie. Surf City, here we come!"* This is either a supernatural coincidence or an omen of some sort. And here I am—Dean-for-a-Day!



After a brief tour of Jan's prospective new digs, where he conspiratorially urges me to impress his star status upon the landlord, we head back up the hill to his parents' home on Linda Flora—his boyhood home, in fact—where he cut the early demos that launched his music career. As "Jan & Dean's Greatest Hits" plays out on the console, I remark how much I had enjoyed those records while growing up. "Oh, I've got better stuff than that," he interjects. "Come into my garage and I'll show you."

The garage proves to be the man-cave—decades before that expression is coined—of a hi-fi aficionado or, in this case, a former pop star. Over the course of several hours, and well into night, Jan cues up tapes on a reel-to-reel recorder, while scratchy ten-inch acetates and obscure 45s with homemade-looking labels are given successive auditions on a vintage turntable. I am treated to ersatz radio shifts hosted by a teenage Jan Berry, spinning vintage R&B sides on "K-JAN Radio." Fascinating stuff.



But most intriguing are those acetates and 45s. Tunes with titles like “Fan Tan,” “Love & Hate,” “Hawaii” and “Laurel & Hardy” spill out through the vintage amplifier and speaker. I compliment Jan on these arrangements and productions. He proudly proclaims, “I will have Top 40 hits again, you’ll see.” When he plays me a test pressing of a tune called “Blowing My Mind,” I’m inclined to agree. But when I spy a previously unknown Jan & Dean album festooned with a psychedelic cover and ask him about it, he dismisses my inquiry. “Nah, that’s no good. That’s just Dean.” On a subsequent visit, he will give me this particular LP.

I had no prior knowledge of these post-accident recordings. And to this date, only dedicated Jan & Dean fans are familiar with them. But had they seen legitimate release at the time—like their friends and colleagues the Beach Boys—the duo’s artistic legacy may have been extended beyond the realm of surfboards, hot rods and “two girls for every boy.”

After a career that spanned seven years (1959 – 1966), 26 chart records, and at least three distinctly different genres of the Rock & Roll Era—doo wop, teen idolatry and surf music—Jan & Dean’s recording career seemingly came to an end on April 12, 1966 when Jan Berry’s car plowed into the rear end of a parked gardener’s truck.



Despite their extended run, both Berry & Dean Torrence had assumed that pop music success was a finite gambit, so both had continued their college studies concurrent with their entertainment career. Jan had started med school, while Dean studied architecture before transitioning into advertising design.

Former high school classmates, Jan and Dean were friends, but far from bosom buddies. Berry ruled the partnership with a heavy hand. Among the indignities showered upon Torrence was his occasional exclusion from various vocal sessions. Jan Berry had definitive ideas about the duo's arrangements and recordings and, on occasion, he would substitute Phil (P.F.) Sloan or Tony Minichiello of Jan & Dean's backing group, the Matadors, on background or falsetto vocal parts.



Jan Berry, producer Lou Adler, Dean Torrence in Jan & Dean's heyday

Jan's "my way or the highway" approach to things ruffled more than a few feathers. Hal Blaine, ace studio drummer of L.A.'s legendary session musicians now known as "the Wrecking Crew" admitted that Jan stepped on more than a few toes as a result of his ambition. "Yeah, prior to his accident, he alienated some people with his attitude. After the crash, a couple of people even said that he had it coming. But I'm sure they didn't really mean it. I loved Jan—we got along well—and most of "the Crew" liked and respected him, too. A lot of his work was really great—and this was a musically untrained kid! But I think the traits that drove his ambition and his anger also contributed to his accident."



Jan Berry and session drummer Hal Blaine

While Dean spent many hours at Jan's bedside during the weeks and months he remained in the hospital and rehab, he was pragmatic about the duo's future. "I figured that we had a good run, and that I'd better have a back-up plan in case Jan didn't recover. That's when I segued from architecture to advertising design. I don't like heights! But I wanted to keep our options open and the Jan & Dean brand alive just in case. So I went back into the studio."

Despite having been unceremoniously relegated to sidekick for much of their career, Dean had been an armchair student of Jan's prowess as a songwriter, arranger and producer. Jan & Dean's contract with Liberty Records expired in '66, so Torrence assumed that he was free to explore other options. Enlisting some of the new Wrecking Crew recruits—including drummer Mickey Jones, bassist Joe Osborn, keyboardist Larry Knechtel (later of Bread) and Ricky Nelson's guitarist, James Burton—Dean started laying down tracks for a new "Jan & Dean" album. "We cut these tracks in Joe Osborn's garage studio in North Hollywood, and the musicians would drop by just for the hell of it and play. No union fees, no payments! I would make suggestions regarding arrangements, but for the most part, what you hear on that album just came about as they played together in the studio."



Joe Osborn (foreground), studio session

Music historians should note that just a couple of years later, the Carpenter's cut their earliest (and highly-coveted) sides for the Magic Lamp label in Osborn's garage studio.

A rain-themed concept album, "Save For A Rainy Day," resulted and was initially issued on Torrence's own J&D imprint as a "Jan & Dean" album. Considered a bridge project 'til Jan recovered, Dean even enlisted Jan's lookalike brother Ken to substitute for him for the cover photo. An ultra-rare item until it was reissued on CD in 1995, "Save For A Rainy Day" stands proudly amongst other soft-pop projects of the era—a genre that, ultimately, would be branded as "Sunshine Pop." Other progenitors of the sound included the Association, the Parade, the Sunshine Company and countless other vocal-oriented groups that veered off from the emergent, harder, guitar-oriented acts that now characterize the Classic Rock format.



Dean had acquitted himself so successfully that Columbia Records cut a deal with him to re-release "Save For A Rainy Day" on the major label imprint. The first single released, "Yellow Balloon," had been written by Gary Zekley (d. 1996), a former high school classmate of Dean's and, today, a revered cult music figure. Just as Dean's single entered the *Billboard* charts, injunctions filed by Jan Berry's publishing company, as well as legal sword rattling by Jan's father, acting as conservator, caused the Columbia deal to fall through. Zekley assembled the same group of studio musicians and singers that had cut Dean's record and issued "Yellow Balloon" and assembled a group, not-so-inventively christened The Yellow Balloon. The nearly identical recording reached the Top 30 on the U.S. national charts.



His efforts crushed, Dean would only regroup for one more recording in the following year, a contemporary remake of the Beach Boys' "Vegetables." This oddity had originally been a component in Brian Wilson's then-unreleased masterpiece, "Smile," and showed up on the more organic and unplugged "Smiley Smile" LP in September '67. Dean enlisted Brian to co-produce and, just weeks later, the single was released on the White Whale label under the moniker "Laughing Gravy." Dean explains: "Both Jan and I had been big fans of Laurel & Hardy movies. A lot of our humor stemmed from them. One of their early films had featured their pet dog named 'Laughing Gravy.' This was so perfect because this was the era of bands with stupid names like Ultimate Spinach and the Electric Prunes, and the song was titled "Vegetables." Plus I couldn't use the name Jan & Dean anymore. So I put this out and it bombed."



Meanwhile, Jan Berry had been in intensive therapy, literally re-learning to walk and talk again. And almost exactly a year to the day from his accident, he was back in the studio. Still signed to an onerous recording, publishing and management deal with Screen Gems—one that surely would not survive legal scrutiny in this era—deals were bandied about with both Liberty and Columbia Records. The latter might have resulted in a true Jan & Dean reunion and an amalgamated release of Dean's "Save For A Rainy Day" tracks and Jan's new works, but legalities and the animus between the duo tanked the deal. Jan's future recordings would now be licensed to Warner Brothers Records.



The biggest impediment to new releases was simply that Jan could barely talk yet, let alone sing. His first release, "Only A Boy," was one of the few existing tracks that featured an already-recorded, pre-accident lead vocal. For new recordings, Jan had to enlist old friends to cut new and credible records.

Hal Blaine: "We all wanted to help Jan out. It was amazing that he had survived at all. But when he was in the studio, despite the fact that he could barely even talk, he could still sound out arrangements. He would play piano with his good hand and direct us. But he would get very frustrated."



Jan Berry (center, eyes closed) directing post-accident recording session

Glen Campbell: "Jan was my buddy. I played on most of the Jan & Dean sessions. I think one of my best gigs ever was on "Ride The Wild Surf," especially on those opening licks. He kept telling me to come up with something that sounded like waves crashing, so I started imitating Dick Dale's sound. Jan wasn't happy with that and then he told me to imagine Chuck Berry riding a huge wave, and that's how I came up with that sound—those are Chuck Berry licks, surf-style.

"After his accident, he came back to the studio and wanted to work, but he just couldn't sing at that point, so he had several of us handle the lead vocals on the tracks he produced. I was good at imitating other singers. I did a pretty good Elvis, and I had filled in for Brian (Wilson) for a six-month Beach Boys tour. So I did my best to imitate Jan on the couple of Jan & Dean tracks I did. Actually, I don't think Dean was even on those."



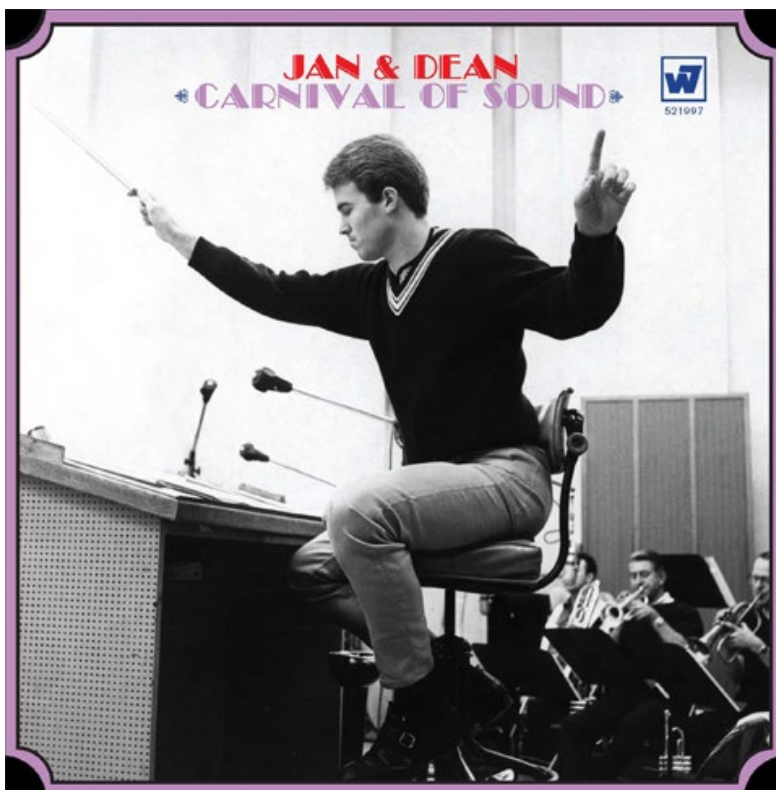
Glen Campbell (center) w/ James Burton (left) and contract string section

And indeed he was not. Old resentments and injunctions that had killed Dean Torrence's project threatened to come full circle and prevent Jan from issuing any further records under the Jan & Dean banner either. But Dean capitulated. "The publishing company (Screen Gems) and Jan's father had pretty much screwed me, and I was still pissed off. But Jan was having such a difficult time anyway I thought, 'What the hell, let him have the brand.' It was my gift to him."

In the year since Berry's accident, pop music had gone through a seismic—or perhaps *cosmic*—shift. 1967's airwaves were full of trippy new sounds courtesy of Donovan, the emerging San Francisco scene and, of course, *Sgt. Pepper*. Despite having been immersed in intensive therapy the previous year, the evolving sounds of the music scene were not lost on Jan. As he stated at the time, "Now I'm making psychedelic music!"

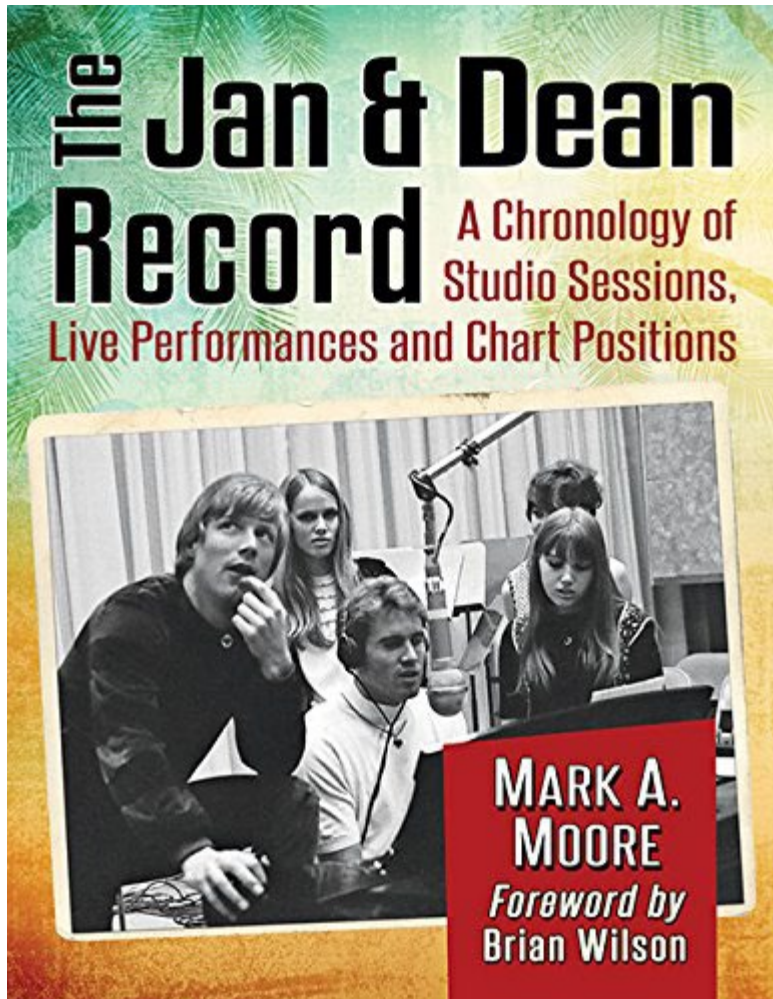


The new sides he was cutting were reflective of the era—trippy lyrics, quirky chord changes and swirling arrangements layered with orchestral mixes and fuzztone guitar. All told, Jan came close to completing a dozen new tracks throughout the balance of '67, as well as dusting off a few pre-accident tracks, one of which, "Girl, You're Blowing My Mind," sported a previously completed Berry lead vocal. Various ten- or twelve-song acetates exist of the original project that Jan had dubbed *Carnival of Sound*. Other stand-out tracks include "Mulholland," "Love and Hate," "I Know My Mind" and "Hawaii," featuring vocals by Glen Campbell, Monkee pal Davy Jones, and top sessions singers including Ron Hicklin and Tom & John Bahler.



This was not only music-as-therapy for Jan Berry, these were credible, contemporary productions. Having caught the Doors' stint as house band at the Whisky A-Go Go on the Sunset Strip, Jan even attempted a cover of "Light My Fire" before the band released it as their first single. The unfinished track remains in the vaults. Sadly, the term "unfinished" would ultimately characterize the entire project.

Mark A. Moore, Jan Berry's official biographer and author of *The Jan & Dean Record: A Chronology of Studio Sessions, Live Performances and Chart Positions* has done an extraordinary, forensic job of unraveling both the creative details and legal wranglings behind Jan's post-accident recordings, and the factors and conspiracy of fate that ultimately torpedoed their release.



"First and foremost, the restrictive Screen Gems contract controlled any and all usage of the name "Jan & Dean," as well as all of Jan Berry's creative activities. Then, of course, the guys were at odds, both personally and, for a time, legally. Jan had always been in charge, and he bristled at anyone trying to take the lead, including his father, who had arranged that the studios in which he was recording would not allow Jan to take master tapes outside the building. Of course, this was like throwing down the gauntlet which resulted in Jan not only "stealing" the masters, but spending \$14,000 to press two singles on his own label. He was bootlegging himself!" *Collectors, take note!*



Despite a partial physical recovery that had exceeded initial expectations, Moore notes that Jan remained hampered by his traumatic brain injury. “Jan could not accept the severity of his injury, nor his loss of control. This was compounded by impulse impairment, and he was prone to flying off in fits of rage when things didn’t go his way. Obviously, this served to alienate friends, family and colleagues.” And record companies.

Sessions for *Carnival of Sound* spilled into 1968 and, by the end of the First Quarter, Warner Brothers had grown skeptical of the project—past deadline, over-budget and punctuated by Jan’s periodic erratic behavior. And despite Screen Gems’ previous zealous hold on Berry, they utilized a timely deliverables clause to terminate his contract, effectively relegating the project to the Warner vaults for the next four decades. *Carnival* was finally dusted off as an archival release by Rhino Records in 2010.



Jan would continue to record periodically, but with diminishing results. Dean became a successful and Grammy-winning graphic designer, creating album cover art for acts including the Beach Boys, Chicago, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Linda Ronstadt, the Supremes and the Turtles. And in 1978, a TV movie, "Deadman's Curve," piqued a resurgent interest in the duo which led to Jan & Dean's reunion as a touring act on the oldies circuit until Jan's death in 2004.



Twilight days of Jan & Dean, 2003

Jan Berry never realized his dream of hitting the Top 40 again, but the belief and effort sustained him. And while today Dean Torrence seems sanguine about their ultimate fate, fans –including biographer Mark A. Moore—lament this obscure and final chapter in Jan & Dean’s recording history. “Can you imagine an album in ‘67 that had Dean’s ‘Yellow Balloon’ side-by-side with Jan’s ‘Girl, You’re Blowing My Mind?’ Two bonafide hit singles and an on-ramp to further creative works. Jan & Dean are viewed by so many as simply a Beach Boys knock-off. Their legacy would have been so much more robust, and deservedly so.”

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*Mark A. Moore’s The Jan & Dean Record: A Chronology of Studio Sessions, Live Performances and Chart Positions, McFarland 2016 and Dean Torrence’s Surf City—The Jan & Dean Story, SelectBooks 2016, in combination, serve to form a definitive take on the duo. Carnival of Sound is available from Rhino Handmade and Save For a Rainy Day is available from Sundazed.*

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