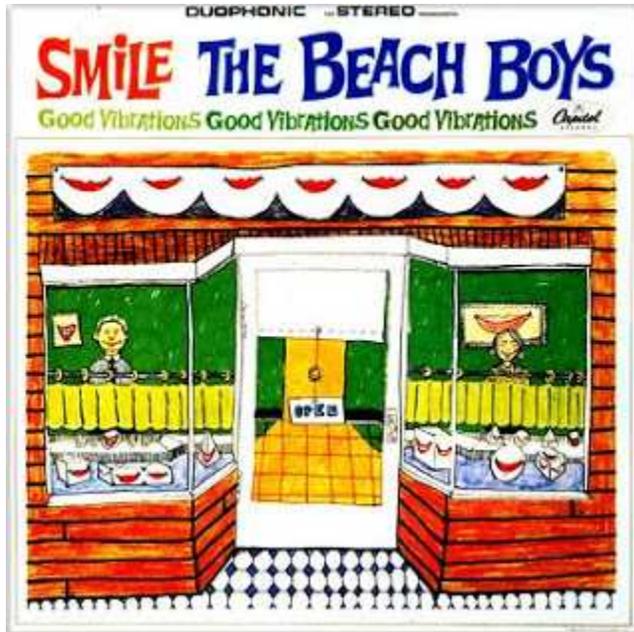


*(Digital Video Singles.com Blog Entry, 2009)*

As we've mentioned previously, the team here at DVS has a combined century or two of experience in the music industry. And in the course of their travels, they've had some interesting moments and encounters along the way. From time to time, we'll have one of our intrepid foot-soldiers in this treacherous, joyous business of music share one of their notable adventures. Enjoy!



## **An Early Morning “Smile” with Dennis Wilson**

**A DVS staffer remembers his surprise glimpse of the “lost” Beach Boys classic**

One of the biggest announcements in the music industry so far this year is the planned release of the Beach Boys' legendary “Smile” album, a project that has, largely, languished in the vaults since 1967. To be released on the heels of group leader Brian Wilson's greatest triumphs to-date, the classic “Pet Sounds” LP and the still-revolutionary “Good Vibrations”, “Smile” was to be Wilson's magnum opus.

But internal dissention within the group, legal battles with Capitol Records and the sheer weight of the ambitious and still-unfinished project finally caused Brian to shelve the album. Almost mythical even in its day, “Smile” would go on to become the most famous unreleased album in Rock & Roll history. Brilliant “Smile” tracks like “Cabinessence”, “Surf's Up” and “Cool Water,” re-worked and doled out for subsequent LPs, only heightened the perceived tragedy of a classic lost.

Brian Wilson's increasing gradual retreat from the affairs of the Beach Boys over the next 20 years are well-known, and many –including Brian himself—have attributed the “Smile” debacle as the pivotal moment in that arc. But miraculously, Brian re-emerged in 1988 with a debut solo album that returned him to the music scene as an active recording and performing entity—a personal and professional triumph that has been greeted enthusiastically by fans and critics alike.

While recent projects such as “That Lucky Old Sun” and “Brian Wilson Re-imagines Gershwin” have been great critical and commercial successes, Brian's return to the project that had haunted him for four decades is arguably his most noteworthy. In 2004, coaxed and aided by members of his impeccable touring band, Wilson and company painstakingly re-recorded “Smile” from scratch, completing songs and passages that had been abandoned incomplete 37 years earlier. Both a musical and emotional catharsis for Wilson, the yoke of “Smile”, lifted from his shoulders, seems to have freed and returned him to greater artistic form.

But Brian Wilson's “Smile” is not the Beach Boys' “Smile”. While the original iteration was also uniquely a Brian Wilson project, its hallmarks are the singular vocal instruments of the three Wilson brothers –Brian, Dennis and Carl, cousin Mike Love, Al Jardine and Bruce Johnston. Possessed of a vocal blend unmatched in pop music history, and at the peak of their powers, the Beach Boys and the original 1966/67 sessions for “Smile” remain as eagerly anticipated as ever. Capitol Records' likely summer release of the Beach Boys' “Smile” will conclude a 44-year saga of unmatched artistry, anticipation and disappointment on a triumphant note.

One of the team members here at DVS, Scott Paton, may have awaited this release with even greater anticipation than most. More than 30 years ago, he was given a rare sneak peek at one of “Smile's most legendary tracks, and his account of that memorable day follows.



In early January 1978, I was working for Los Angeles radio syndication firm as a writer on Casey Kasem's famed countdown show, "American Top 40." I also moonlighted as an interviewer for the company's "Robert W. Morgan's Special of the Week"-- a 60-minute, exclusive profile on significant hitmakers of the day. I was charged with interviewing Dennis Wilson for an upcoming Beach Boys program, so I headed out to Brother Studios --which he owned with his brother Carl—in Santa Monica.

It was a 10:00 am appointment, which was uncharacteristically early for any rock star, but Dennis was at the top of his game then. He looked like he had just come from an early morning workout—bright-eyed, fit --now clean-shaven—and bristling with energy. He was still riding a wave of critical acclaim for his lone solo album, "Pacific Ocean Blue," which had been released a few months earlier. And he was eager to continue work on a follow-up, the aborted "Bambu," and to make a "really good Beach Boys" album. He was especially high on some tunes that Carl had been writing. Our interview took place behind the board in the control room of the studio.

Counting myself among the most ardent of Beach Boys fans, left to my own purposes that day, I would have gone really deep into the band's history and the nooks and crannies of their rich catalog. But the show for which this interview was intended was targeting a general audience, and Dennis, to his great credit, addressed all the standard topics with great candor and enthusiasm. DW was far and away the best interview subject in the band. No filters, no B.S., always truthful and emotionally unguarded.

Ultimately, we got around to the 10,000-pound gorilla that appeared in any Beach Boys story-- the aborted "Smile" project. Remember, up until this point, Brian Wilson always claimed in the rare interviews he submitted to that he had destroyed most of the "Smile" session tapes, particularly the mythic "Fire" tapes from the LP's intended "Elements Suite". When I mentioned to Dennis how tragic this was, he stopped the conversation and hollered, "Earl!" summoning Brother Studio's staff engineer, Earl Mankey into the studio. "Hey, Earl, cue up that tape we were listening to last night." Mankey went into an adjacent closet and grabbed a 10" reel of tape and slapped it on one of the two-tracks in the room. When he assured Dennis that it was good-to-go, Dennis hit play, sat back in his chair, and waited for my reaction.

What emerged from the control monitors was what would best be described as an "orchestrated cacophony." A conundrum to be sure, but such was the magic in the arrangement skills of Brian Wilson. Percussion and strings merged to conjure up images of a crackling, searing inferno—as vivid as any film-maker could convey. The siren of an imaginary fire truck only punctuated what was already a fully-realized aural portrait. I knew that I was listening to the stuff of legend, and no doubt, my jaw was on the floor. I looked to Dennis for his reaction, and I could see

that he was struggling to maintain a poker face, clearly reveling in my stupefied amazement.



When the music concluded and, after a moment to compose myself, I asked how this could be? Brian had destroyed the tapes. Dennis laughed and said, "You know Brian. He just says that so people drop the subject. He's never destroyed anything." Dennis went on to tell me that the "Smile" tapes had not been touched at all since 1971 when the majestic "Surf's Up" had been exhumed for the Beach Boys' album of the same name. But the "Fire" tape had probably not been played since 1967 until the previous evening, and that we were the first to hear it in more than a decade.

You can imagine how desperately I wanted to hear more from this cache of unearthed tapes, but time was limited, so we concluded the interview and I headed to the office, still a bit in shock.

Several years later, when bootlegs of this legendary material started appearing, I was finally able to re-experience these sounds that had literally been seared into my brain. But nothing could ever top that morning in January '78—that very first listen with Dennis Wilson seated in front of me.

In the intervening years, most die-hard Beach Boys fans have had the opportunity to hear much of the group's "Smile" via those countless bootleg discs. And, of course, Brian Wilson's 2004 re-creation of the project was one of the most lauded albums of recent years. But I'm thrilled that the general public will at last have the chance to hear "the most famous unreleased album" –albeit in unfinished form—featuring the unparalleled vocals of the Beach Boys.



### [Links](#)

Brian Wilson "Smile"

[http://www.amazon.com/Smile-Brian-Wilson/dp/B0002LI11M/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1301849707&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Smile-Brian-Wilson/dp/B0002LI11M/ref=sr_1_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1301849707&sr=1-1)

Dennis Wilson "Pacific Ocean Blue"

[http://www.amazon.com/Pacific-Ocean-Legacy-Dennis-Wilson/dp/B001BET0SC/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1301849843&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Pacific-Ocean-Legacy-Dennis-Wilson/dp/B001BET0SC/ref=sr_1_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1301849843&sr=1-1)

Beach Boys/Capitol website

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