

## I Just Wasn't Made for These Times; Brian Wilson in Concert Michael's Rock and Roll Posse

We attended the May 12 Brian Wilson concert at the Houston Revention Center, one of the better mid-sized venues in Houston, right downtown, with several restaurants and good parking nearby, and pretty accessible as these things go. It also has great sightlines and acoustics, which really matter. We had seen Brian there before, and I have seen him with or without the Beach Boys seven times, including my first time, in Summer, 1967 at the old Albuquerque Civic Auditorium (he was not playing with them at the time), when the group doubled with newcomers Gary Puckett and the Union Gap as the warmup act. In many ways, this one last weekend was the most memorable, and not entirely for good reasons. First, I admire these entertainers who have been at it for so long, over 50 years in his case, especially those who are in the pantheon and whose glorious output is still fresh and deep. He performed 19 of his greatest hits, interspersed with 4 or 5 more recent works. This included California Girls, Darlin', In My Room, Don't Worry Baby, and Wild Honey, among many other surfing and car songs—all of them immediately recognizable. He wrote all of them, and they all have remained classics, with almost no one else ever covering them any better. He could have rotated another dozen in and still not finished his extensive songbook. To his credit, he also did not sing Kokomo, one of the more execrable BB songs, which inexplicably reached No. One on the Billboard charts in 1988. (It was written by John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas, and originally performed by Phillips, Scott McKenzie, Terry Melcher, and the Beach Boys' Mike Love. In other words—no Brian DNA on the song.)

Then, in the second half, he performed *Pet Sounds* straight through, the way it was recorded in 1966. In my view, *Pet Sounds* is one of the best pop albums ever released, with 13 songs—all of them by Brian except Sloop John B, a derivative traditional sea chanty—which hang together as a whole, and which include four of his greatest songs: Wouldn't It Be Nice, God Only Knows, I Just Wasn't Made for These Times, and Caroline, No. All four of these just drove me to tears, especially the sad and mournful I Just Wasn't Made for These Times, which is so wrought with autobiographical overtones that I just sat there in awe at its expressive power of loneliness and angst.

For an encore, they performed Good Vibrations, Do You Wanna Dance? ( a cover of the original by Bobby Freeman), Barbara Ann (first performed by The Regents),

Surfin' U.S.A., Fun, Fun, Fun, and Love and Mercy. That is a lot of great music, wonderfully performed.

The Beach Boys were singular, with the creative genius of Brian Wilson, who was very influenced by the many doo wop groups and harmonic performers, such as the The Lettermen and The Four Freshmen, whom he has credited for his early inspiration. Of course, he and Paul McCartney jockeyed with each other, technically innovating and producing extraordinary music in competition with each other.

While I could not help but admire the longevity and resilience of Brian (he will be 75 in June), I was also struck at his clear decline, increasingly evident. He walks on stage with assistance and a halting gait, sits impassively at the piano even when he is singing, and actually buries his shaking hands in his lap when he is not playing the piano. His patter is jolting, and he sort of reminds me of my grandfather near the end, when he would bark out odd remarks that made no sense. (For example, he said twice: “Here is an instrumental, with no singing.”)

Don't get me wrong—he still is engaged much of the time, and never was very good at stage presence, and waning Brian Wilson is better than all but a handful in their prime. But it was sad, and elegiac all at once. He cannot harmonize like the old days or hit the high notes, which load falls to the array of excellent and supportive musicians who form the core of his entourage. And original Beach Boy Al Jardine is with him, sings robustly, and is a reminder of the continuity of the core band over these 50+ years. Happily, Al's son Matthew Jardine sings many of the Mike Love and Carl Wilson vocals—surprisingly well, because he is Al's son, because he is a strapping foot taller than his dad, and because he sings like an angel on the high and falsetto notes. He reminds me of Aaron Neville, another hulking guy with a high voice that blends into the group vocals.

It is the idea and ethos of the Beach Boys that continue to appeal to me, with a brilliant and self-destructive leader who is so insightful and vulnerable. Touring is taking its toll, but is also likely life-affirming for him. It is certainly so for his many aging fans who adore him and who know the lyrics to even his more obscure songs. He changed American music forever, and his core dozen or so songs are among the best the genre has to offer.

For a look at Matthew Jardine, see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIAWruWefQI>

For a look at the Four Freshmen (a successor group still tours), see:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETo\\_XFEGl24](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETo_XFEGl24)

For an exquisite cover of God Only Knows by many artists, see the unbelievable BBC version, with snippet cameos of Brian:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqLTe8h0-jo#action=share>

Next up: U2 and stadium rock.

Happy summer to all my Posse members,

Michael