

Surf's Up

THE BEACH BOYS

Brian Wilson remembers writing some of the great songs of the 1960s.

When you were a kid, what was the first song you can remember that you really liked?

I would have to say "Sh-boom." Yeah, and then the real big shocker of them all, "Rock Around the Clock." That totally turned my lights on, you know.

You must have started writing when you were really young. Were you in high school?

No, I wrote my first song when I was nineteen years old. I'd sort of got into Chuck Berry, and he stuck in my mind—he pioneered those surf melodies. And then I took his style and extrapolated on it, you know, expanded on it.

I started playing the piano when I was ten or eleven, and my uncle Charlie taught me how to play the boogie-woogie, in the key of C. It was fun. I really got off on it. And I learned how to play Chuck Berry rhythms with my left hand at the keyboard. When I say the piano, forget it—the whole world turns into a song.

Did you ever use music to help you meet girls?

Not really, but I'll tell you one thing. The guys that were at Hawthorne High School with me were extremely competitive people. After I graduated from high school, I took a lot of shit with me, the competitive shit.

Did everyone around you know that you guys were already into music?

Well, yeah. Once, Mike Love and I and two other guys at Hawthorne did a song called "Bermuda Shorts." And then later we expanded—I mean, we had "Surfin'" and "Surfer Girl." I wrote "Surfer Girl" before I wrote "Surfin'."

When you write, what are the tools you like to use? Do you usually have a tape recorder on, or do you ever use a rhyming dictionary?

No, never a rhyming dictionary, but now and then I use a tape recorder.

What part of the house did you write in when you were still at the house? Did you write in your room?

Oh no. There was a music room that was like a garage my dad had converted. There was a hi-fi and a piano and an organ in there, and so I'd go there every day after school. It's two steps down from the living room. Two little steps down, then you walk down a little corridor, and there's a whole beautiful piano in there. So I would get down there and sit at the piano, and I would go, "Well, this is really going to be great." Or the Four Freshmen, I'd put them on, and, oh wow, I think I know what they're saying. So I'd take that and learn on the piano verbatim what the Freshmen did—you know, their harmonies. I could pick out any harmony in the world from the Four Freshmen.

Do you ever have a block when you're trying to write?

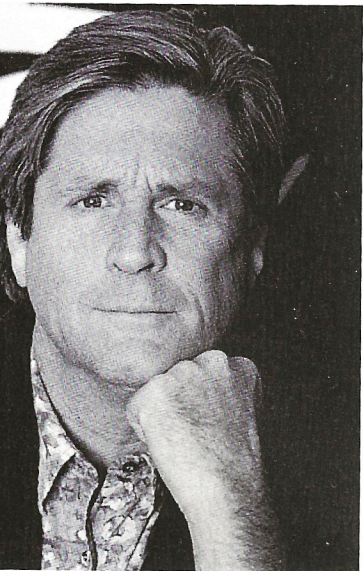
I get that sometimes, and I'll say, 'Goddammit,' I'll cuss to myself, or I'll throw something across the room and really get it off my chest, you know. And then it's like, back to the grindstone.

What was it like working with Van Dyke Parks on "Surf's Up"?

Well, he's probably the nicest guy I've ever met. He's a very kind and courteous person, and he makes working a breeze. He is a great producer, too. That's all there is to it.

The music is almost like classical music. But the lyric—what exactly is it about? It's hard to figure out. Do you remember?

No, not really. It has pretty advanced lyrics. It's almost like poetry set to music. They were lyrics, but they're more than just that.



(Archive Photos/E. Capri/SAGA)

SURF'S

UP

lyrics by Van Dyke Parks
music by Brian Wilson

A DIAMOND NECKLACE PLAYED THE PAWN
HAND IN HAND, SOME DRUMMED ALONG, WO
TO A HANDSOME MAN AND BATON
A BLIND CLASS ARISTOCRACY
BACK THROUGH THE OPERA GLASS YOU SEE
THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM DRAWN
COLLUMNATED RUINS^S DOMINO

CHORUS

~~THE~~ CANVAS
~~THE~~ THE TOWN
AND BRUSH THE BACKDROP
ARE YOU SLEEPING BROTHER JOHN

HUNG VELVET OVERTAKEN ME
DIM CHANDELIER AWAKEN ME
TO A SONG DISSOLVED IN THE DAWN
THE MUSIC HALL A COSTLY BOW
THE MUSIC ~~BALL~~ IS LOST FOR NOW^{FROM}
TO A MUTED TRUMPETERS SWAN
COLLUMNATED RUINS DOMINO

CHORUS

DOVE NESTED TOWERS THE HOUR WAS
~~THE~~ STRIKE THE STREET QUICKSILVER MOON
CARRIAGE ACROSS THE FOG
TWO STEP TO LAMP LIGHTS CELLARTUNE
THE LAUGH'S COME HARD IN AULD LANGS SYNE
THE GLASS WAS RAISED, THE FIRED ROSE
THE FULLNESS OF THE WINE THE DIM LAST TOASTING
~~THE~~