

Brian Wilson (Icons of Pop Music)

Kirk Curnutt



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Brian Wilson is a genius. Ever since British press agent Derek Taylor launched a publicity campaign with that theme to promote the landmark LP *Pet Sounds* in 1966, some variation of that claim has been obligatory when discussing the significance of the Beach Boys' founder and chief composer. Originally designed to liberate Wilson from his outmoded image as a purveyor of sunand-surf teen pop so the symphonic sophistication of his music might be properly appreciated, the assertion has been repeated so often in the forty-plus years since as to render it virtually meaningless. Indeed, if anything, the label today seems an albatross around the man's neck, inasmuch as Wilson's slow-but-steady reemergence as a working musician since the mid-nineties after three decades of mental illness and drug abuse, has been freighted with expectations that he again produce something as epochal as "Good Vibrations" to justify the adoration he inspires in impassioned defenders.

Brian Wilson interrogates this and other paradigms that stymie critical appreciation of Wilson's work both with the Beach Boys and as a solo artist. This is the first study of Wilson to eschew chronology for a topical organization that allows discussion of lyrical themes and musical motifs outside of any prejudicial presumptions about their place in the trajectory of his career. The book emphasizes the often overlooked point that, despite his status as a "living legend," Brian Wilson does not always fit neatly into the paradigms of taste and value by which critics grant certain artists entry into the pantheon of pop and rock importance.



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