

Flashback: Happy 80th Birthday to Brian Wilson of 'The Beach Boys'

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- [80th](#) [2]
- [Al Jardine](#) [3]
- [Birthday](#) [4]
- [Brian Wilson](#) [5]
- [Carl Wilson](#) [6]
- [Dennis Wilson](#) [7]
- [Eugene Landy](#) [8]
- [Good Vibrations](#) [9]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [10]
- [Interview](#) [11]
- [Joe Arce](#) [12]
- [Love & Mercy](#) [13]
- [Mike Love](#) [14]
- [Murry Wilson](#) [15]
- [Music Box Theatre](#) [16]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [17]
- [Pet Sounds](#) [18]
- [The Beach Boys](#) [19]
- [Wouldn't It Be Nice](#) [20]

CHICAGO – In 2015, I got the call that I would get an opportunity to interview legendary songwriter and pop artist Brian Wilson of the 1960s supergroup The Beach Boys. He was at the Music Box Theatre in Chicago introducing the bio-film “Love & Mercy.” Today (June 20th) is Brian Wilson’s 80th Birthday, and the interview is reprinted below.

Brian Douglas Wilson was a baby boomer born in California, the epicenter for his later pop song dreams. He grew up in an “authoritarian” household, run by his father Murry, which included his brothers – and future bandmates – Carl and Dennis Wilson. Blessed with a musical talent, Brian was pushed into the pop/rock scene of the early 1960s. The Beach Boys blazed onto the scene in 1961, with their first hit “Surfin’,” and followed it up with a string of hits that defined summer through the mid-1960s. The hits include “Surfin’ USA,” “Little Deuce Coupe,” “In My Room,” “Fun Fun Fun,” “I Get Around,” “California Girls,” “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” and “Good Vibrations,” among many others, all within a four year period.

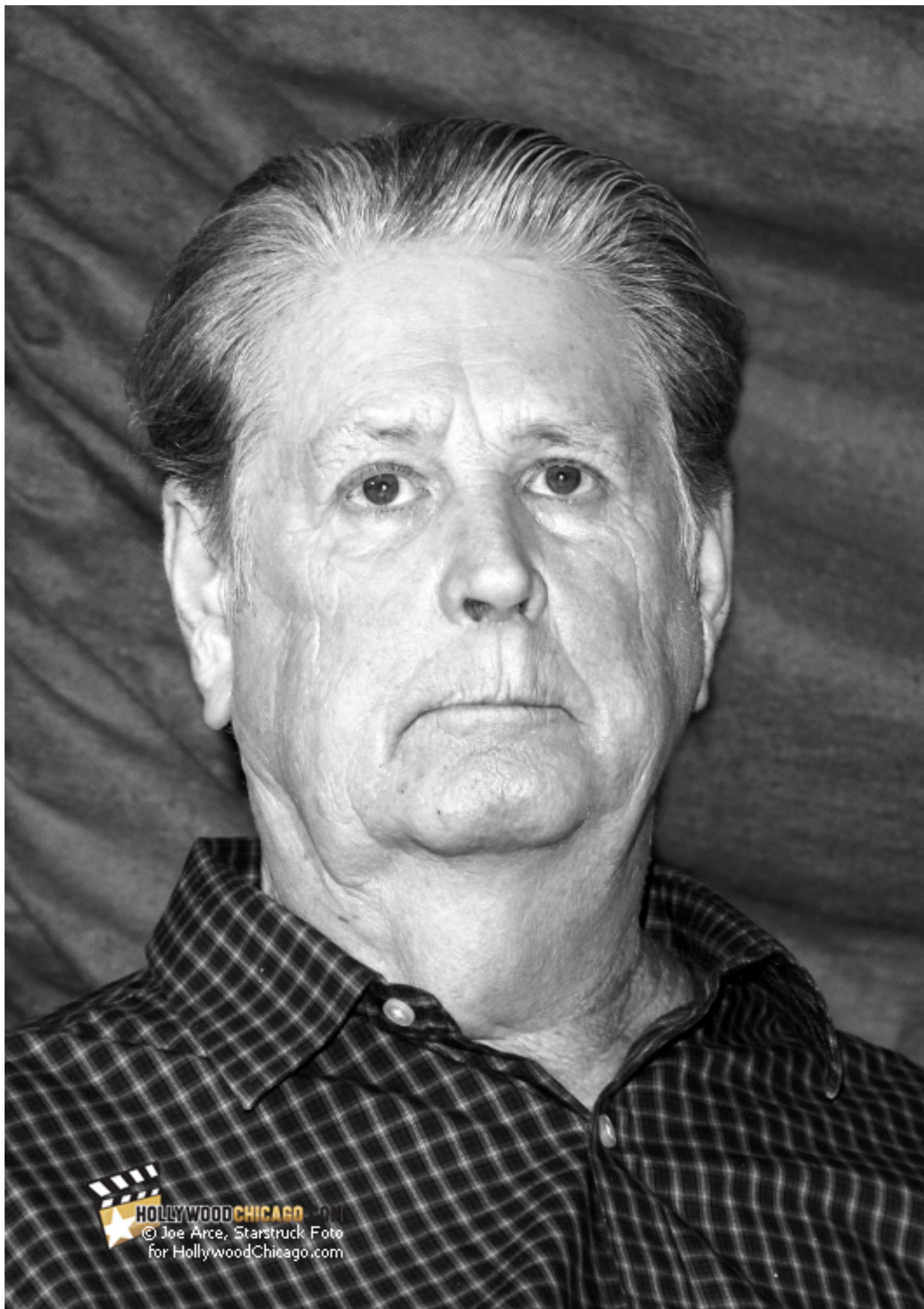


The Interviewer and Brian Wilson in Chicago, May 18th, 2015

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Wilson entered a darker period in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with psychological issues, drug use and problems facing the world. In 1975, his wife Marilyn and his family enlisted therapist Eugene Landy, who helped Wilson gain some life traction, and get back into normalcy. After

his divorce from Marilyn in 1979, Wilson began to rely more and more on Landy's radical care, the peak of which is played out – in the mid 1980s – in the film "Love & Mercy." As he slowly re-emerged after splitting with Landy, Brian Wilson has reestablished himself as one of the pre-eminent souls in rock history, and given his life story a true survivor.



The Survivor: Music Icon Brian Wilson in Chicago, May 18th, 2015

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: Which time period in the film felt most acutely present in your soul when you saw the film, the young Brian of Paul Dano or the Brian that John Cusack portrayed?

Brian Wilson: It's definitely when I met Melinda [Wilson's current wife] when John [Cusack] and Elizabeth [Banks] portrayed us. Just as you see in the film, I bought a car from her. That felt like it was there.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did you feel about seeing your father Murry portrayed again in the film, and what do you think actor Bill Camp captured in your father that was most remarkable?

Wilson: He captured the authority. My Dad was a very authoritarian person, and it was captured by the actor in the film. I thought he did a great job.

HollywoodChicago.com: If I can ask you to go back to the 'Pet Sounds' sessions right now, what is your feeling – as an artist – when you heard the album put together for the first time?

Wilson: We achieved a mellow rock album, not hard edge rock and roll, but a more mellow sound. Mike Love didn't like it at first, but I kept telling him I wanted to experiment with something different, other than our car songs of the past. So as I played him more of the instrumental cuts, he suddenly said, 'that's all right.' We laid down the vocals, and the rest is what it was.

HollywoodChicago.com: I recently saw a video of you and Paul McCartney performing 'God Only Knows.' In your friendship and admiration of Paul, and his friendship and admiration of you, what do you think you understand most about each other, as artists and working class boys who became rock stars on different places on earth?

Wilson: First, we were born two days apart in the same year. Paul was born on June 18th, 1942, and I was born on June 20th. We never got to know each other in the early days, but really admired each other's work. When I created 'Pet Sounds,' Paul and the boys went to work and created 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band,' both albums speak for themselves. Paul is one of the greatest songwriters in the world, and I relate to him as a songwriter myself.

Paul once helped out the group by eating a stalk of celery. When we were doing 'Smile' sessions, we recorded the sound of his chewing, and later gave him credit. [Laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: How difficult is it to see how people change once success comes along for a band. What did you find hardest about approaching that change in Mike [Love], Al [Jardine], even your brothers Dennis and Carl?

Wilson: For the most part, everyone stayed the same. They took to it graciously. We were never like 'we're the greatest group!' That kind of attitude just wasn't there, we stayed humble. Mike had a bit of an ego – basically he cooperated, – but he would tell you if he didn't like a tune. He loved the early stuff I wrote for him, like 'Surfin' Safari,' 'Surfin' USA' and 'Do It Again.'

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you get the feeling that the studio wanted you to make the same records, and didn't want you to experiment further?

Wilson: There was pressure from the company, yes. In those days, if you were hot like we were, they wanted another album immediately. We made six albums in two years.

HollywoodChicago.com: As a songwriter, you've had to define love in many ways, and in many eras of your life. At this point, what is your definition of love personally, and is it something that you still can interpret in your songwriting art?

Wilson: I define love not so much through melody or harmony or lyrics or the song, but it is everything that comes together, that four-part blast that comes out of the speakers – creating more harmony – and in a way, love.

Happy 80th Birthday Brian Wilson, June 20th, 2022



[Click here](#) [21] for the HollywoodChicago.com interview with John Cusack for “Love & Mercy”



[Click here](#) [22] for the HollywoodChicago.com interview with Al Jardine of The Beach Boys



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- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/80th>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/al-jardine>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/birthday>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brian-wilson>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/carl-wilson>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dennis-wilson>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/eugene-landy>
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- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/murry-wilson>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/music-box-theatre>

- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pet-sounds>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-beach-boys>
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