

U nder Lock & Key

Pat St. John



DVD-A

The Beach Boys *Pet Sounds*
Capitol 72434-77937-9-0

I SUPPOSE SOME PEOPLE will wonder how I can make comparisons between The Beach Boys and The Beatles. Actually, there are a number of justifications. First off, they did it themselves. *Rubber Soul* was the inspiration for Brian Wilson to do *Pet Sounds*. *Pet Sounds* was the inspiration for *Sgt. Pepper*. Beatles producer Sir George Martin came right out and said it: "Without *Pet Sounds*, *Sgt. Pepper* wouldn't have happened. *Pepper* was an attempt to equal *Pet Sounds*." A Sir Paul McCartney quote for you as well: "No one is educated musically until they've heard *Pet Sounds*."

I've got my own thoughts on this. The Beach Boys were our great American band. Sure, they started out with the two-minute pop songs, as did The Fab Four, but the BB's subject matter was mostly surfing and car songs. If you still think of

IN ADDITION to being on WCBS FM in New York, Pat can now be heard nationally on Sirius (Satellite Radio) from noon to 6:00 p.m. Eastern time seven days a week on stream 15 "The Rock" and Saturday and Sunday Nights in "The Vault" on stream 16 from 6:00 p.m. to midnight Eastern time. Visit Sirius.com and PatStJohn.com

them as only doing that (and that's understandable because those are the songs that radio seems to "remember," as opposed to The Beatles, whose later songs are the ones that get the most airplay these days), you will have *lots* to discover in the Beach Boys' later material. Let me state that I believe there's not a bigger Beatle fan than me, but perhaps I could say the same for "The Sunshine Boys."

So when am I going to get to the review? It's coming.

First, allow me to go back to '66 when *Pet Sounds* first came out. I didn't "get it" then as the masterpiece it truly is. I also didn't "hear it" as the concept album that it truly is. Perhaps it was the inclusion of "Sloop John B" that had nothing to do with the rest of the songs. (That was Capitol's fault, as the company guys obviously pressured the Boys to include their current single on the LP.)

Let me just do two more Beatles/Beach Boys comparisons, then I promise to get to *Pet Sounds 2003*. Back in those early days, mono was more important (to both groups) than stereo. It took around three hours for the Beatles to do the stereo mix of *Sgt. Pepper*. Much different than the stereo mix, they spent some three days mixing the mono version. Brian Wilson didn't do a stereo mix at all, though Capitol put a "re-channeled" version out (mistake). If you A/B the two mono LPs, as I have, you'll find that the sound from *Sgt. Pepper* seems to come from between your two speakers, and that *Pet Sounds* comes to you fully from both speakers. Strange but true, in *Pet Sounds*, they created what I believe is the best-sounding mono recording this writer has ever heard. Lastly and most surprising bit of trivia to me, is the fact that *Pet Sounds* didn't go "platinum" until the year 2000! (Whoa!)

All right, here we go. You don't have to get this DVD-A to have *Pet*

Sounds in "revelatory" form. Start, if you wish, with the "remastered" CD containing both the mono mix *and* the stereo mix of the entire album. Just hearing it in true stereo is so cool.

If you want to go further (much further) pick up The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* box set from 1997. If you spring for that, you already must feel the same way I do about this album. To make four full compact

**However you cut it,
The Beach Boys
are the one
great American band.**

discs out of a 40-minute LP seems ridiculous, yet the box contains not only the mono and stereo mixes, it delivers the entire program in "vocal only" form (jaw-dropping stereo harmonies), and "backing track only" versions which are nothing short of astounding. Brian employed the best studio musicians he could find, starting with drummer Hal Blaine and continuing from there, and he worked 'em until he got *exactly* what was in his head.

Some of these people didn't know if he really knew what he was doing ... until they heard the final product. He used sounds and techniques that had never been **tried** before. He created sounds that had never been put down on tape before. All the while, he was doing this musical conducting, he still had the future "vocal" harmonies rattling around in his mind for when the actual rest of the band would finally get to hear what Brian was up to.

This box set also provides much of the music "in progress," as well as experimentation as to who'd sing lead on what, and what each other member would be assigned to sing and how to sing it. There are versions of these songs that are simply fascinating as you hear them approach their final released form. I will warn you. If you try to listen to this entire four CD collection in one

sitting, it might make you as crazy as Brian was often accused of being, but it will be "genius-crazy (if there is such a thing). I did it when I first got it, and I was "crazy" about it. I don't do that anymore, but on the other hand, it is not a box that just sits on my shelf, I've gone back to it many times.

Now, this new DVD-Audio release takes it a step further.

Utilizing the work they put into making the box to create this 5.1-surround mix, they actually isolated the original "vocal only" tracks, and had to sync them up with the "music only" sessions to create this experience.

Again strange, you're advised in the liner notes not to be surprised if there seems to be almost nothing coming from your center speaker. It's a "phantom" sound emanating from there. Weird, I suppose, but totally satisfying, totally "Hi-Rez" from original 1966 equipment and the technical limitations of those times. A two-sided disc, bonus material includes the original video promo for the album, a color video of "Sloop John B" and the original black and white film that was made for the song, and more. Interviews with the whole band are here, and it's something you can really get into.

If I'm preaching to the already converted, so be it. If I'm trying to turn you on to something you never really appreciated for what it is (and I was once one of you), this will get you started on the years and years of Beach Boys music which came after *Pet Sounds*. One of the songs on this album is titled "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times." Brian, you probably weren't. But I'm so very thankful you were here when you were, and that I was here at the same time, and that we're both still around to enjoy your masterpiece, again and again. For something this old to become so new again is really a gift, and Sir, you are gifted! (If you were English, you'd have had that title by now!)