



Underdogs: The Beach Boys in 1977, a reluctantly returning Brian keeping a low profile

THE BEACH BOYS

We Gotta Groove: The Brother Studio Years UME
8/10

Reunited with its troubled leader, an American pop institution attempts to meet the challenges of a new era. *By Jason Anderson*

FOR the Beach Boys and everyone around them, the year of 1976 was about putting an upbeat face on a situation that should've elicited very different feelings. Hence the marketing campaign that trumpeted "Brian Is Back!", a slogan that celebrated the return of the architect of the band's greatest triumphs after years of struggles.

More disconcerting was watching a man who'd long ago retreated from public view get thrust in front of cameras and onto stages. Brian's worst humiliation arrived in *The Beach Boys: It's OK!*, a TV special whose title reeked of the same forced good cheer. In one segment, John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd played cops who barged into Brian's home and charged him with offences including "failing to surf". After being hauled off to the beach, the bearded recluse – so afraid of the ocean, he'd never learned to surf – gamely hit the waves alongside

the *Saturday Night Live* stars. Sloshing around in a green bathrobe, Wilson looks as you'd expect: scared, bewildered and not a little pissed off.

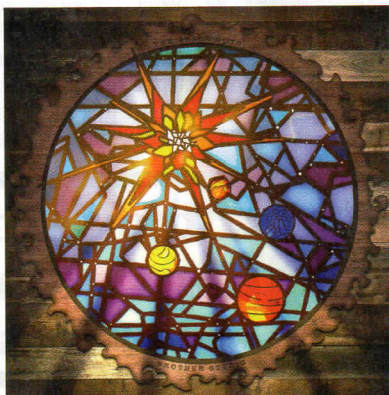
The stunt helped promote *15 Big Ones*, the first Beach Boys album to solely credit him as producer since *Pet Sounds*. It was also the first of the band's albums to be recorded at Brother, the studio they

established in Santa Monica in 1974. Since Wilson's participation in new Beach Boys recordings was a condition in the Reprise deal, the band had struggled to keep him working. When the 1974 compilation *Endless Summer*

landed them back on top of the charts and boosted their draw as a touring act, it became even more imperative to have Brian "back", regardless of whether he was in any condition to be there.

All that barely begins to suggest the fraught circumstances that sometimes impact the music on *We Gotta Groove: The Brother Studio Years*, the latest archival release to explore The Beach Boys' rocky yet often fruitful era through the 1970s. Newcomers to this saga can refer to 2021's *Feel Flows: The Sunflower & Surf's Up Sessions 1969-1971* and 2022's *Sail On Sailor – 1972* to get up to speed. But even ardent Beach Boys scholars may be left seasick by their attempts to follow the band's journey across the highs and lows of these particular turbulent waters.

By the time Belushi and Aykroyd kicked him out of bed, Wilson had already been remarkably busy by his standards. After a few false starts and enough internal rancor to justify the album's working title of 'Group Therapy', most of *15 Big Ones* was completed in the first half of 1976. One major sign of Wilson's increased presence was the prominence of his Moog and ARP synthesizers, utilised partially to replace time-consuming sessions with string players. Though the band initially focused on covers to warm up the musicians and defuse conflicts between songwriters



over whose songs to use, the versions of oldies like “Rock And Roll Music” came to outnumber the originals on the final product. A few more covers – including a garish “On Broadway” – surface among the 15 *Big Ones* outtakes and alternative mixes on the last disc of *We Gotta Groove*.

Given the hodgepodge nature of the first release marking Wilson’s return, it’s not surprising the set devotes more attention to the two much more interesting albums that followed. Or rather, there would’ve been two had the commercial failure of *The Beach Boys Love You* in 1977 not prompted Reprise to cancel plans for *Adult/Child*, thereby ensuring the latter’s status as the second most mythic of The Beach Boys’ lost albums.

As was the case with the 21st-century incarnations of *Smile*, the circulation of *Adult/Child*’s contents via bootlegs undercuts *We Gotta Groove*’s significance as the host of the album’s first official iteration. Likewise, its greatest song – the achingly beautiful “Still I Dream Of You”, which appeared on the *Good Vibrations* set in 1993 – and its most execrable – “Hey Little Tomboy”, a lowlight of 1978’s *M.I.U. Album* but thankfully excluded here – have long been available, too.

Yet the opportunity to behold such a comprehensive survey of Wilson’s artistry even in this compromised state can be both startling and staggering. That’s especially true of *The Beach Boys Love You*, an album that’s packed with deeply odd, synth-laden ditties about smooth-rolling sweeties (“Roller Skating Child”), super-cool talk-show hosts (“Johnny Carson”), and astronomical discoveries (“Solar System”). The vocals-only versions of “The Night Was So Young” and “Let’s Put Our Hearts Together” and other demos emphasise the songs’ childlike spirit of joy and invention. The album’s most ardent defenders – like Peter Buck and Brian, too – become easier to believe, though those who call it The Beach Boys’ punk record go a step too far.

The same capacity for wonder and whimsy marks the forays into big-band balladry on *Adult/Child*. Disappointed when Frank Sinatra declined to record any of his offerings, Wilson and arranger Dick Reynolds concocted a swing suite that feels like a wonderfully wobbly counterpart to *In The Wee Small Hours*.

The group’s other songwriters get chances to shine, too. A song that Dennis Wilson failed to finish for *Pacific Ocean Blue*, “Holy Man” appears here with a gorgeous, mostly wordless vocal by Carl. An instrumental early incarnation of Carl’s “Angel

THE BEACH BOYS LOVE YOU (1977 Mix) LP1

- 1 Let Us Go On This Way
- 2 Roller Skating Child
- 3 Mona
- 4 Johnny Carson
- 5 Good Time
- 6 Honkin’ Down The Highway
- 7 Ding Dang
- 8 Solar System
- 9 The Night Was So Young
- 10 I’ll Bet He’s Nice
- 11 Let’s Put Our Hearts Together
- 12 I Wanna Pick You Up
- 13 Airplane
- 14 Loves A Woman

Love You Outtakes (CD Only)

- 15 Ruby Baby
- 16 Marilyn Rovell
- 17 Sherry She Needs Me
- 18 Lazy Lizzie
- 19 We Gotta Groove (2025 Mix)
- 20 Hey There Mama (2025 Mix)
- 21 Clangin’ (2025 Mix)
- 22 Loves A Woman (Al Jardine Vocal)
- 23 Johnny Carson (Alt Mix With Intro)
- 24 You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling

ADULT/CHILD SESSIONS LP2

- 1 Life Is For The Living
- 2 Deep Purple
- 3 It’s Over Now
- 4 Still I Dream Of It
- 5 Everybody Wants To Live
- 6 Lines

- 7 It’s Trying To Say
- 8 Shortenin’ Bread
- 9 New England Waltz
- 10 Life Is For The Living (Backing Track)
- 11 Deep Purple (2025 Backing Track Mix)
- 12 It’s Over Now (2025 Backing Track Mix)
- 13 Still I Dream Of It (2025 Backing Track Mix)

1974-1977 Select Outtakes (CD Only)

- 14 Holy Man (2025 Mix Carl Wilson Vocal)
- 15 Carl’s Song 1 (It Could Be Anything) (2025 Mix)
- 16 Carl’s Song 2 (Angel Come Home) (2025 Mix)
- 17 String Bass Song (Rainbows) (2025 Mix)
- 18 10,000 Years Ago
- 19 Gimme Some Lovin’ (2025 Mix)
- 20 Honeycomb (Marilyn Wilson-Rutherford Vocal)
- 21 In The Back Of My Mind (1975 Alternate Take 2025 Mix)

15 BIG ONES OUTTAKES AND ALTERNATE MIXES LP3

- 1 Just Once In My Life (2025 Mix)
- 2 Mony, Mony (2025 Mix)
- 3 Running Bear (2025 Mix)
- 4 Shake, Rattle And Roll
- 5 On Broadway (2025 Mix)
- 6 Sea Cruise (2025 Mix)
- 7 Chapel Of Love (2025 Mix)

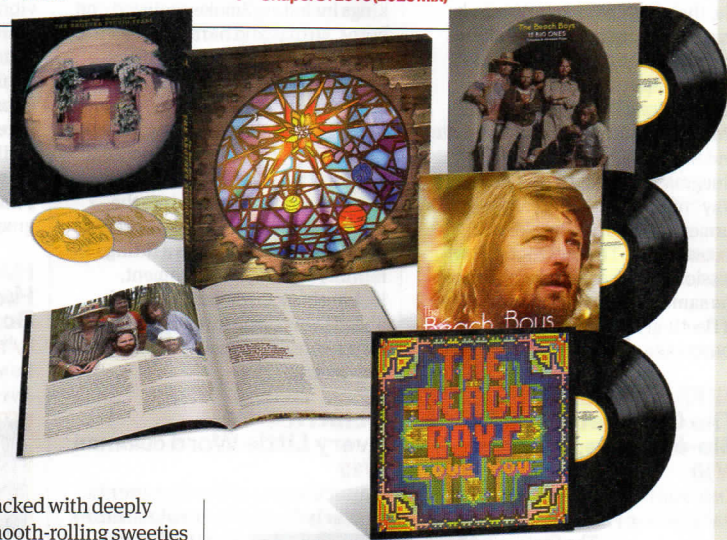
- 8 Short Skirts (2025 Mix)
- 9 TM Song (2025 Backing Track Mix)
- 10 Rock And Roll Music (2025 Backing Track Mix)
- 11 Had To Phone Ya (2025 Deconstructed Mix)
- 12 Just Once In My Life (2025 Backing Track Mix)

Love You Alternate Mixes (CD Only)

- 13 Let Us Go On This Way (Alternate Mix)
- 14 Mona (2025 Deconstructed Mix)
- 15 Honkin’ Down The Highway (Billy Hinsche Vocal)
- 16 Ding Dang (Session Highlights and Unedited 2025 Mix)
- 17 Solar System (2025 Backing Track Mix)
- 18 The Night Was So Young (2025 Vocals Only Mix)
- 19 Let’s Put Our Hearts Together (2025 Coda Mix)

Love You Brian Cassette Demos (CD Only)

- 20 That Special Feeling (Demo)
- 21 It’s Over Now (Demo)
- 22 They’re Marching Along (Demo)
- 23 Loves A Woman (Demo)
- 24 Mona (Demo)
- 25 Airplane (Demo)
- 26 Let’s Put Our Hearts Together (Demo)
- 27 I’ll Bet He’s Nice (Demo)
- 28 Still I Dream Of It (Demo)



Brian Wilson’s artistry can still be both startling and staggering

Come Home” – later finished for 1979’s *L.A.* – is ready for a yacht cruise. Then there’s “We Gotta Groove”, a *Love You* outtake whose chugging rhythm and downpitched vocal harmonies epitomise the band’s zigzagging creative impulses through a very weird time. “*We can groove it on this waaayyyvve*”, they sing, the voices rising up as if to support poor Brian as he thrashes in the waves with Belushi. So maybe he’s waving and not drowning after all.