

# PET PROJECT

By ANNA BERKEN | Southern California News Group

May 16 marks the 50th anniversary of the release of “Pet Sounds” by the iconic California band The Beach Boys. Brian Wilson spent months composing and recording the album, widely hailed as a masterpiece, with professional musicians and his bandmates. He innovated recording techniques still in use today.



The Beach Boys, clockwise from left, Al Jardine, Mike Love, Brian Wilson, Carl Wilson and Dennis Wilson, shown here in 1966.

## RECORDING ‘PET SOUNDS’



In January 1966, The Beach Boys were on tour while Brian Wilson remained in California. He wrote much of the music and lyrics and recorded over an intense four-month period. His band mates returned to record the vocals, concluding in April 1966 and spending an unprecedented \$70,000 on production.

Brian Wilson was a notorious perfectionist, and after more than 20 takes of “Wouldn’t It Be Nice,” Mike Love teased Brian, giving him the moniker “dog ears,” claiming he could hear things no one else could.

### THE WRECKING CREW

Members of the musicians collective, formed in Los Angeles around 1960, stood in for bands during studio recording sessions. Their collective talent made them the most requested musicians for popular bands at the time. They played on a plethora of classics, including “Mr. Tambourine Man” by the Byrds, “California Dreamin’” by the Mamas & the Papas and “Mrs. Robinson” by Simon & Garfunkel. Brian Wilson hired up to 23 musicians to play at a time for “Pet Sounds.”



### SOUND EXPERIMENTS

Wilson recorded unusual sounds and utilized classical instruments atypical of popular music at the time. He even recorded his own dogs barking, inspiring the album title.



## INNOVATION

Multitrack recording was introduced in the 1940s with the advent of magnetic-tape technology. It allowed various parts of the music to be recorded separately, manipulated and layered to create the final song. By the 1960s, three- and four-track recording devices were the industry standard, and Brian Wilson stretched the limits of the technology to create “Pet Sounds.”

### Typical recording

- 1 BACKING MUSIC RIGHT
- 2 BACKING MUSIC LEFT
- 3 VOCALS
- 4 INSTRUMENTALS

Most musicians at the time recorded music in stereo, using two tracks for backing music and the others for vocals and instrumentals.

### Brian Wilson’s recording technique

- |                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 1 PERCUSSION/KEYBOARDS  | MUSIC  |
| 2 HORNS                 | VOCALS |
| 3 GUITAR/BASS           | VOCALS |
| 4 STRINGS/INSTRUMENTALS | VOCALS |

Most sound systems were still mono at the time, so Wilson decided to use the other tracks to record instruments individually. He mixed the levels of each instrument, then dubbed down the backing music to a single track, freeing up the other tracks for vocals. He used an eight-track on several songs, leaving as many as seven tracks of vocals layered over one another.

Though recording has moved beyond magnetic tape, the technique of recording each instrument separately is used today in digital recording.

## INFLUENCE



### The Beatles

In May 1966, Bruce Johnston, who was filling in for Wilson on tours, took a copy of “Pet Sounds” with him to England. Keith Moon, drummer for The Who, brought John Lennon and Paul McCartney to Johnston’s hotel to listen to the album. McCartney said it “blew me out of the water.” In 2012, Rolling Stone magazine ranked “Pet Sounds” the second greatest album of all time. McCartney said it inspired the Beatles to make “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” which ranked first on Rolling Stone’s list.



## CAREER OF HITS

In Hawthorne in 1961, brothers Carl, Dennis and Brian Wilson formed a singing group with their cousin Mike Love and schoolmate Al Jardine. Over the course of their tumultuous career, they produced 29 studio albums, eight live albums and 82 singles.

The band played at local high schools, calling themselves The Pendletones until recording their first hit, “Surfin’,” and adopting the name The Beach Boys.

Their father, Murry Wilson, became the band’s manager and ruthlessly pushed them to succeed.

They signed with Capitol Records in 1962.

Murry showed up drunk during the recording of “Help Me, Rhonda,” and the band fired him.

After Brian experienced a nervous breakdown, he stayed home and began work on “Pet Sounds.”

“Good Vibrations” was supposed to be on “Pet Sounds,” but the band could not complete the song for months as Brian obsessively perfected it.

In 1969, the band sued Capitol Records and left to form the label Brother Records, one of the first artist-owned labels.

Brian Wilson struggled with mental health and drug abuse in the 1970s.

Murry died in 1973 of a heart attack. Brian and Dennis did not attend the funeral.

“Endless Summer” was a surprise hit, revitalizing the band’s career.

In 1977, the band signed a contract with CBS, worth \$8 million, requiring Brian to write four new songs and 70 percent of material on each album they produced.

In the late ’70s, Carl and Dennis struggled with drug and alcohol abuse.

Brian exited the band for rehabilitation in 1982.

In 1983, Dennis drowned in a boating accident.

Brian returned in 1988; the band released “Kokomo” the next year.

Legal battles ensued over song-writing credits and unpaid royalties.

Carl died in 1998 from cancer.

The remaining members split only to reunite on tour for the 40th anniversary of “Pet Sounds.”

The band split again but reunited for a 50th anniversary tour.

Brian Wilson now tours on his own, and Love continues to represent The Beach Boys on tour.

