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Brian Wilson's Pet Sounds

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Abstract

Pet Sounds, the landmark Beach Boys album of 1966, has received wide acclaim as one of rock's first 'concept albums'. It also represents a milestone in the artistic evolution of the group's primary creative force, Brian Wilson. A thorough examination of the texts and music of the songs of *Pet Sounds* reveals a unified art work projecting a coherent textual narrative. Songs are associated and interrelated via recurrent motives and harmonic patterns, expressing extremely personal themes of romance and heartbreak. The musical ideas are mostly culminations of Brian Wilson's earlier work – they are the 'pet sounds' that he had been raising and nurturing since the early 1960s – but they appear here in an unprecedented artistic context. Despite Wilson's continued, if sporadic, productivity in the decades that followed, including the ill-fated *Smile* project, *Pet Sounds* stands as his crowning artistic achievement, an album with vast appeal and broad influence.

The Beach Boys released their eleventh studio album, *Pet Sounds*, in May 1966 to a mixed public reaction. Although the record reached tenth place in the album charts in July, it fell far short of the kind of commercial response that Capitol Records had come to expect from a Beach Boys album. And while it fared better in England, thanks in part to the efforts of publicist Derek Taylor, it remained a perplexing oddity to fans of the group's earlier work. Upbeat, danceable songs like 'I Get Around' (1964) and 'Help Me, Rhonda' (1965) had now given way to a very different overall sound, and to song texts of insecurity and despair. The album was overshadowed as well by the spectacular success of the group's number-one single 'Good Vibrations' later that year. As resulting tensions began to surface within the Beach Boys, and between them and Capitol, the year 1966 became an important crossroads for the band, and for its primary creative force, Brian Wilson.

Since then, however, *Pet Sounds* has emerged as a milestone of sixties popular music. It has received widespread critical praise and regularly appears at or near the top of 'all-time-best' lists.[1] Its ardent proponents include Paul McCartney, who called it 'my inspiration for making *Sergeant Pepper*', and Eric Clapton, who said 'it encompasses everything that's ever knocked me out and rolled it all into one'.[2] In 1997 Capitol released *The Pet Sounds Sessions*, a four-disc set of remixes, session excerpts, and alternate versions that yields many insights into the album's production and recording history.[3] This set was accompanied by a 126-page booklet, 'The Making of *Pet Sounds*', that is itself an important contribution to the Beach

1 In November 2003 *Rolling Stone* placed it second (behind the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper*) on their list of '500 Greatest Albums of All Time'; and on 2 October 1993 *New Musical Express* had it first on their list of '100 Greatest Albums'.

2 See Leaf, 'The Making of *Pet Sounds*', 10; Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 201.

3 Beach Boys, *The Pet Sounds Sessions* (see Discography below).

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Boys literature, while three recent books have explored the history and importance of the album in still greater detail.[4] Decades of hindsight have confirmed that *Pet Sounds* is indeed an extraordinary achievement – for any musician, but especially for the 23-year-old Wilson, who was largely self-taught and who had evolved remarkably since founding the group, along with his brothers Dennis and Carl, cousin Mike Love, and friend Al Jardine, in late 1961.

And yet there is still more to say about the music of *Pet Sounds* and its place in rock history. We now know myriad details of the album's recording chronology and biographical context, but not much about the compositional strategies and technical basis of the album's distinctive soundscape. It has been held up as an early 'concept album', predating *Sergeant Pepper* by over a year, and yet the precise nature of its overall musical unity and projection of a consistent artistic vision remain to be revealed. There is more to say too about the central creative force himself and the artistic pathways that brought him to this stage in his career. The album is indeed the 'pet sounds' that Brian Wilson had been raising and nurturing, and it is above all an artistic statement of a very personal kind. As musical autobiography and as a musical and artistic achievement, *Pet Sounds* repays repeated listening, and close scrutiny of the ideas that make it work.

The 'Beach Boys Sound' that Brian Wilson singularly crafted in the years leading up to his *magnum opus* is grounded in the music he heard as a youth in Hawthorne, California, in the late 1950s.[5] His musically inclined parents cultivated his precocious musical abilities and exposed him to Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and old standards. He taught himself to play the piano. Around 1956 he developed a keen interest in the mellow jazz harmony of the *The Four Freshmen* and spent hours studying and deconstructing every song on the group's albums.[6] He also discovered doo-wop and rock and roll and organized impromptu performances with family and friends of current hits by Chuck Berry, the Coasters, and the Everly Brothers, among many others. When he and his fledgling group, first called the Pendletones, assembled over Labor Day weekend 1961 to create an original song for a local record producer, the result was 'Surfin'', an amalgam of doo-wop and blues-based rock and roll with strong echoes of another southern California group who were just as well schooled in late fifties pop, Jan and Dean.

4 Leaf, 'The Making of *Pet Sounds*'; Abbott, *The Beach Boys Pet Sounds*; Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*; Fusilli, *Pet Sounds*.

5 The history of the Beach Boys has been thoroughly documented. Of the sources listed in the Bibliography, the most informative are those by Leaf, *The Beach Boys and the California Myth*; Preiss, *The Beach Boys*; White, *The Nearest Faraway Place*; and Carlin, *Catch a Wave*. Keith Badman's *The Beach Boys* is another useful resource. Steven Gaines's *Heroes & Villains* is full of information but loses credibility beneath a veneer of scandal-obsessed sensationalism. Brian Wilson's *Wouldn't It Be Nice* is useful but is plagued by questions of authorship and the apparently significant contributions made by co-author Todd Gold and Wilson's therapist Dr Eugene Landy. Informative films include *The Beach Boys* (Malcolm Leo), *Brian Wilson: a Beach Boys Story* (Morgan Neville), *Endless Harmony* (Alan Boyd), *I Just Wasn't Made for These Times* (Don Was), and *Beautiful Dreamer* (David Leaf); see Filmography below.

6 The Four Freshmen released fourteen studio albums between March 1955 and May 1961. Wilson's interest in the group seems to have waned somewhat in 1958 or 1959, although he was intimately familiar with at least one cut on the 1961 album *The Freshman Year*, an a cappella rendition of Bobby Troup's 'Their Hearts Were Full of Spring' that was sung by the Beach Boys during the early years, including a version with new text (by Mike Love, in tribute to James Dean) entitled 'A Young Man Is Gone' that appeared on the *Little Deuce Coupe* album (1963).

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Throughout the Beach Boys albums of the early sixties, Wilson found effective ways to infuse rock and roll with rich, Four Freshmen-style vocal textures.[7] His distinctive falsetto carries the main melody at the top of block chords, in direct imitation of Bob Flanigan's high tenor in the Freshmen sound, and notably unlike vocal styles in which the melody sounds below a descant voice (as is the case in the work of the Everly Brothers, Four Aces, or Four Coins). At other times his arrangements follow the doo-wop model of melody over background chords, possibly employing neutral or nonsense syllables and a prominent bass line. But at some point during this time he also became aware of the innovative production style of Phil Spector, in songs such as the Crystals' 'There's No Other (Like My Baby)' (1961), 'He's a Rebel' (1962), and 'Do Doo Ron Ron (When He Walked Me Home)' (1963), and especially the Ronettes' 'Be My Baby' (1963). Spector's idea of a 'wall of sound', of creating distinctive timbres through novel instrumental combinations, begins to influence Wilson's work in the three Beach Boys studio albums of 1964, *Shut Down Volume 2*, *All Summer Long*, and *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album*. And by the time of the group's two albums of 1965, *The Beach Boys Today!* and *Summer Days (and Summer Nights!!)*, Wilson had become committed to a production and arranging style that emphasized colour and variety, whether from combining common instruments in unusual ways or using instruments not normally found in popular music, such as the xylophone or harpsichord.[8]

When the Beach Boys began sharing space with the Beatles on the US record charts in early 1964, Wilson was motivated by the competition but rarely tempted to absorb aspects of the Liverpool sound into his own work. Although 'Girl Don't Tell Me' from *Summer Days* (1965) is a direct imitation of a Beatles song ('Ticket to Ride'), the evolution of Wilson's work in 1964 and 1965 mostly follows a trajectory that had already begun before the British invasion, now accelerated and more focused. 'I knew we were good,' he told radio station WKXJ in 1966, 'but it wasn't until the Beatles arrived that I knew we had to get going. [. . .] So we stepped on the gas a little bit.'[9] When he heard the Beatles' *Rubber Soul* in late 1965, however, his competitive respect took on a whole new dimension. As he recalled,

> The album blew my mind because it was a whole album with all good stuff. It was definitely a challenge for me. I saw that every cut was very artistically interesting and stimulating. [. . .] I decided right then: I'm gonna try that, where a whole album becomes a gas. I'm gonna make the greatest rock 'n' roll album ever made! [. . .] So I immediately went to work on the songs for *Pet Sounds*. I said, 'Come on. We gotta beat The Beatles.'[10]

7 For further discussion of these albums and of many other aspects of Wilson's musical activities over the course of his career referenced throughout this article, see Lambert, *Inside the Music of Brian Wilson*.

8 He used a xylophone on 'All Summer Long' from the *All Summer Long* album (1964), and a harpsichord on 'When I Grow Up (to Be a Man)' from *Today!* (1965). Neither is unprecedented in popular music: a xylophone was used in 'The Shoop Shoop Song (It's in His Kiss)' by Betty Everett (early 1964, prior to the recording date for 'All Summer Long'); and a harpsichord appears in, among other songs, Jill Corey's 'Love Me to Pieces' (1957), Jerry Wallace's 'Primrose Lane' (1959), Sam Cooke's 'That's It, I Quit, I'm Movin' On' (1961), and Roy Orbison's 'Blue Bayou' (1963). A harpsichord is also used prominently in the Four Freshmen album *First Affair* (1960).

9 Badman, *The Beach Boys*, 52.

10 Quoted from an unspecified source in Badman, *The Beach Boys*, 104.

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Rubber Soul appealed to him not only because of its singular musical personality, but also because of its art music aspirations. In the words of Terence O'Grady, *Rubber Soul* heralded 'a new approach to rock and roll – an approach that focuses on musical detail rather than on the massive, ear-catching sound gestures of the earlier pop-rock songs'.[11] As Walter Everett writes: '*Rubber Soul*, it seems, was made more to be thought about than danced to.'[12]

Wilson's collaborator in this important new ambition was a new lyricist, Tony Asher, a friend of a friend who eagerly agreed to take leave from his position with a local advertising firm. Wilson had written some of his own lyrics in the past, but had also relied extensively on Mike Love, Gary Usher, and Roger Christian to give his songs poetic resonance. In Asher he found a kindred spirit with some musical ability, a person who understood completely the scope and sensibility of the project and who was able to capture a tone for the lyrics that matched precisely the spirit of Wilson's music. Most of their work together was completed in the early months of 1966, sometimes working out songs slowly, line by line, at other times using an existing instrumental backing track or demo tape as a starting point. In all, the Wilson–Asher team created eight of the thirteen songs on the album; two others are instrumentals, one is a folk-song arrangement, and the remaining two were co-written with others. They also began working during this time on a song that would ultimately become 'Good Vibrations', but this was shelved until *Pet Sounds* was completed, and Asher's lyrics for that song were ultimately rejected in favour of new words by Mike Love.[13]

Table 1 summarizes the recording history of the *Pet Sounds* album, listing the songs chronologically according to initial recording date.[14] The chronology shows, among other things, the work from 1965 that predates the Asher collaboration and the December release of *Rubber Soul*. Wilson's arrangement of the West Indian folk song 'Sloop John B' was originally recorded in July 1965 as a stand-alone single (ultimately released in that format, after additional December sessions, in March 1966) and apparently included on *Pet Sounds* on the advice of the record label.[15] 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)' existed in October 1965 as a wordless vocal chorale, and this became the harmonic underpinning of the verse when Asher's lyrics were written the following January.[16] Wilson seems to have rejected his own original lyrics for a song from 1965 entitled 'In My Childhood' in favour of a new text by Asher that became 'You Still Believe in Me'. And an instrumental originally called 'Run

11 Quoted in Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians*, 309.

12 Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians*, 312.

13 The Asher lyrics for 'Good Vibrations' can be heard on the CD reissue *Smiley Smile/Wild Honey* ('Good Vibrations early take') and on *Good Vibrations: Thirty Years of the Beach Boys* ('Good Vibrations sessions'). Wilson revived them in 2004 for the finale of his reconstruction of the ill-fated *Smile* album (*Brian Wilson Presents Smile*). The song's evolution and structure are elegantly explored by Daniel Harrison in 'After Sundown', 41–5.

14 This chronology is mostly extracted from Badman, *The Beach Boys*. Other information about the sessions can be found in Abbott, *The Beach Boys Pet Sounds*; Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*; Leaf's two booklets accompanying the *Pet Sounds Sessions* CD set; and Leaf's liner notes for the DVD-Audio version of the album.

15 Granata summarizes the history of this tune and Wilson's arrangement, which was apparently first inspired by bandmate Al Jardine; see Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 96–9. Wilson and Jardine probably knew the 1958 version of the song by the Kingston Trio. Other versions had been released by Jimmie Rodgers (1961), Lonnie Donegan (1961), Dick Dale and His Del-Tones (1962), and the Cornells (1963, instrumental, under the title 'Agua Caliente').

16 The vocal chorale that was apparently recorded on 13 October 1965 can be heard on *Pet Sounds Sessions*, disc 3, track 15 ('vocal snippet').

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Table 1 *Pet Sounds* recording sessions

Song title	Writing credit	Recording date(s)
Sloop John B	Trad. arr. BW	1965: 12/7, 22/12, 29/12
Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)	BW, TA	1965: 13/10 1966: 11/2, 3/4
In My Childhood	BW	1965: 1/11
You Still Believe in Me	BW, TA	1966: 24/1, 16/2
Run James Run/Pet Sounds	BW	1965: 17/11
Let's Go Away for Awhile	BW	1966: 18/1, 19/1
Wouldn't It Be Nice	BW, TA, ML	1966: 22/1, 16/2, 3/3, 10/3, 11/4
Caroline No	BW, TA	1966: 31/1, 2/2, 3/2
Hang On to Your Ego	BW, TS	1966: 7/2, 9/2
I Know There's an Answer	BW, TS, ML	1966: 9/2, ?16/2
I Just Wasn't Made for These Times	BW, TA	1966: 14/2, 10/3, 13/4
That's Not Me	BW, TA	1966: 15/2
I'm Waiting for the Day	BW, ML	1966: 1/3, 6/3, 10/3, 12/3
God Only Knows	BW, TA	1966: 8/3, 9/3, 10/3, 12/3, 13/3, 22/3, 11/4
Here Today	BW, TA	1966: 11/3, 12/3, 25/3

BW – Brian Wilson; TA – Tony Asher; ML – Mike Love; TS – Terry Sachen

James Run', recorded on 17 November 1965 as a possible contribution to the soundtrack of a James Bond film, was later retitled 'Pet Sounds'.[17] These tracks became the starting point for *Pet Sounds* when work with Asher began in earnest in January 1966.

In most cases, the initial date or dates for each song represent a session at which only the instrumental backing track was recorded, by the group of Los Angeles session musicians that have since been named the 'Wrecking Crew'.[18] The actual Beach Boys, typically, would not appear in the studio to record vocals until the backing tracks were completed, and in fact were often away on tour while their leader stayed in Los Angeles to formulate the group's next album.[19] In the case of *Pet Sounds*, when members of the group did add vocal parts in February, March, and April 1966, their contributions were limited to backing vocals and an occasional lead. Two of the haunting ballads, 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)'

17 'Run James Run' was never presented to the James Bond film producers. Wilson may have been inspired by the opening cut of the American version of the Beatles' *Help!* album, which had been released in August and which began with fifteen seconds of George Martin's send-up of the James Bond theme.

18 The Wrecking Crew were considered the most skilled session musicians of the time and played on many of the records produced in Los Angeles in the 1960s, including recordings produced by Phil Spector. The group's membership was not fixed, but certainly included, at one time or another, drummers Hal Blaine, Julius Wechter, and Frankie Capp; guitarists Glen Campbell, Jerry Cole, Barney Kessel, Billy Strange, Al Casey, and Tommy Tedesco; bass guitarists Carol Kaye, Ray Pohlman, and Lyle Ritz; pianists Don Randi, Larry Knechtel, and Al DeLory; saxophonists Steve Douglas and Jay Migliori; accordionists Frank Marocco and Carl Fortina; and harmonica player Tommy Morgan. See Leaf, 'The Making of *Pet Sounds*', 59–103; Blaine and Goggin, *Hal Blaine and the Wrecking Crew*.

19 Brian Wilson stopped regular touring with the Beach Boys in early 1965.

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and 'Caroline No', were performed as solo numbers by Brian Wilson alone,[20] and on five others he is either the sole or featured lead vocalist. Even some of the intricate vocal layering features not the full group sound but Brian Wilson's voice overdubbed upon itself. Aside from a few prominent contributions by bandmates, *Pet Sounds* can be experienced almost as a Brian Wilson solo album.[21]

Asher has made it clear that he knew of no overall plan for ordering or relating the songs,[22] but when Wilson finally put them all in sequence, he produced an album structure that has a strong sense of shape and focus and the logic of narrative from song to song. As he once explained: 'If you take the *Pet Sounds* album as a collection of art pieces, each designed to stand alone, yet which belong together, you'll see what I was aiming at.'[23] The narrative begins as two young lovers imagine a perfect future together, dreaming idealistically about the benefits of adulthood ('Wouldn't It Be Nice'). This is followed by a song about the strength of their relationship, which rests securely on the shoulders of the more mature woman ('You Still Believe in Me'). In the third song ('That's Not Me') the narrator describes his own struggle with maturity and the journey away from home to help become better prepared to make an emotional commitment. This is followed by a simple meditation on the depth of their love and the romantic feelings that words can't express ('Don't Talk'). After that we start to notice a change: in song five ('I'm Waiting for the Day') the narrator is the one with the upper hand, the more mature attitude that enables him to be patient with his unpredictable lover. As side A comes to a close, we hear an instrumental interlude whose title, 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', signifies the relevance of the side's last song, 'Sloop John B', in the story. The lovers travel away together – either figuratively, as in a journey through a romance, or literally, to a tropical paradise – but it does not go well and they just 'wanna go home'.

Side B begins with a painfully confessional love song filled with doubt and insecurity, simultaneously expressing deep love and paralysing uncertainty ('God Only Knows'). This is followed by an attempt to cope with sobering reality, by searching deep within ('I Know There's an Answer'). The results of this self-examination are bluntly evident in the next song ('Here Today'), which reaches the conclusion that love is fleeting and cannot be expected to last. As the subsequent song ('I Just Wasn't Made for These Times') implies, the narrator has recognized that they do not belong together, that he was meant for someone else. The story concludes with a pair of reflections on the journey just witnessed, first in the form of an

20 'Caroline No' was released as a single, credited to 'Brian Wilson', in March 1966, backed with 'Summer Means New Love', an instrumental from the Beach Boys' *Summer Days* album (1965).

21 Doe and Tobler say that a 'majority of the vocals on the album were [. . .] by Brian Wilson' (*Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys*, 48). This is not to diminish the contributions of Carl Wilson, whose lead on 'God Only Knows' is one of the album's highlights, or Mike Love, who is the primary lead singer on 'That's Not Me' and 'Here Today', and who shares lead duties with Al Jardine on 'I Know There's an Answer'; but even some of the most prominent choral work on the album, such as the layering in 'I Just Wasn't Made for These Times' (see below), appears to feature entirely Brian Wilson's voice.

22 Leaf, booklet notes for *Pet Sounds Sessions*, 39.

23 Badman, *The Beach Boys*, 134. Several authors have offered similar versions of this narrative in varying detail: see Golden, *The Beach Boys*, 32–5; Milward, *The Beach Boys Silver Anniversary*, 254; White, *The Nearest Faraway Place*, 254; Umphred, 'Let's Go Away for Awhile'; Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 87–9; Fusilli, *Pet Sounds*, 78–9. The interpretation presented here is particularly indebted to those of Golden and Granata. (Song references in the following discussion are to the original vinyl LP *Pet Sounds* album.)

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instrumental summary of primary musical themes ('Pet Sounds'), then in a concluding meditation on the love that once was, and could have been, but was destined to die ('Caroline No').

Wilson may first have encountered the idea of a unified album in the 'theme albums' of his youth, typified by Frank Sinatra's *In the Wee Small Hours* (1955). Four Freshmen albums were organized around themes of instruments (*Four Freshmen and Five Trombones*, 1955; *Four Freshmen and Five Trumpets*, 1957) or ethnic identities (*Voices In Latin*, 1958), but had also presented quite coherent narrative threads among songs of disparate origins in *Voices in Love* (1958) and *Love Lost* (1959); inter-song unity in the latter is enhanced by specially composed modulatory vocal interludes.[24] When Brian Wilson began to put together early Beach Boys albums, he followed similar models to support themes of surfing and cars.[25] From there, and with the inspiration of *Rubber Soul*, the step to an album of songs that not only belong together but also tell a story was entirely logical. His next project after *Pet Sounds*, the ill-fated *Smile*, would have presented an even stronger narrative portrayal – an American history lesson seen through the eyes of a time-travelling bicycle rider on a journey from Plymouth Rock to Hawaii.[26] What followed instead, however, was the unravelling of the *Smile* project in the wake of the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper*. The Beatles showed that a 'concept album' need not contain a song to song narrative structure but may derive overall unity from a general conceptual framework, in this case a fictitious show by an alter-ego band doing a variety of songs, many with 'slice of life' elements.[27] Subsequent contributions to the genre by other bands follow both the narrative and non-narrative models.[28]

Overall unity on *Pet Sounds* is enhanced by strong musical interrelationships among songs. To facilitate discussion of musical issues, Table 2 summarizes the album in its entirety, showing the song ordering, basic formal structures, and keys. The song structures mostly follow common practice, including the aaba 'quatrain' form in three songs and eight other instances of a verse with either a short refrain ('vr') or separate chorus ('vc'). Simple binary structures occur in 'That's Not Me' (in which the ab material is repeated with development) and 'Let's Go Away for Awhile' (which consists only of the two contrasting sections, without a reprise). Key ambiguity in 'Don't Talk' and 'Caroline No' is depicted by square brackets, showing keys that are implied but not strongly established, and in 'God Only Knows' with a question mark, indicating that a strong sense of a single key centre, by emphasis or implication, is generally avoided.[29] Two songs, 'That's Not Me' and 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', start

24 Founding group member Ross Barbour explains the organization of these two albums in *Now You Know*, 120, 124.

25 *Little Deuce Coupe* (1963) comes closest to a true adherence to a prevailing theme, with only two cuts ('Be True to Your School' and 'A Young Man Is Gone') that do not relate directly to cars or the car-dependent, carefree teenage lifestyle. Other early Beach Boys albums promote surfing themes but contain songs about a variety of other topics as well.

26 The *Smile* saga is described in detail in Domenic Priore, *Smile: the Story of Brian Wilson's Lost Masterpiece*.

27 Walter Everett discusses the overall unity of the *Sergeant Pepper* album, including musical factors that involve 'motivic relationships between key areas', in *The Beatles as Musicians*, 122–3.

28 The Moody Blues' *Days of Future Passed* (1967) follows a chronological narrative organized around events in a single day. Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) has no song to song narrative but expresses a thematic point of view about alienation and a perceived madness in modern society.

29 The Table lists the key of 'Caroline No' as it sounds on the recording, although it was actually recorded a semitone lower and then mastered at a higher speed.

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Table 2 Overview of *Pet Sounds*

	Side A							**Side B**					
Song	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6
Form*	aaba	vc	abab	vr	vr	ab	vc	vr	vr	vc	vc	aaba	aaba
Main key(s)	F	B	A–F♯	[G♭]	E	F–D	A♭	E?	B♭	A	B♭	B♭	[D♭]
Secondary key(s)	A, D							A		f♯		G	G♭, b♭

* vc – verse–chorus; vr – verse–refrain

Side A

1 Wouldn't It Be Nice
2 You Still Believe in Me
3 That's Not Me
4 Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)
5 I'm Waiting for the Day
6 Let's Go Away for Awhile
7 Sloop John B

Side B

1 God Only Knows
2 I Know There's an Answer
3 Here Today
4 I Just Wasn't Made for These Times
5 Pet Sounds
6 Caroline No

and end in different keys and so are shown to have two 'main keys', while other songs have the important secondary key areas listed on the bottom line, either tonal excursions for whole phrases or short sections ('Wouldn't It Be Nice', 'God Only Knows'), or brief tonicizations ('Here Today', 'Pet Sounds', 'Caroline No').

The overall key relations in *Pet Sounds* have hints of the kinds of pattern Walter Everett finds in *Sergeant Pepper*, especially in the recurrence of B♭ as a tonic in four of the six songs on side B.[30] The two songs not involving B♭ material on side B, 'God Only Knows' and 'Here Today', feature A major in some way, recalling 'That's Not Me' from side A as well as the opening of the album, the A major introduction to 'Wouldn't It Be Nice'. But a more important source of overall unity is a simple tonal relationship first heard when 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' modulates from F major to D major for the bridge. This at first recalls the third-relation between the song's introduction (in A) and main key (F), but soon takes on thematic significance as other songs in the cycle similarly involve the submediant (major or minor) in some prominent way. It happens next in 'That's Not Me', where the move from A to F♯ major symbolizes the narrator's journey away from home to gain a new perspective. Then, near the end of side A, 'Let's Go Away for Awhile' takes the listener away from F to D, recalling the exact keys of verse and bridge in 'Wouldn't It Be Nice'. On side B the major submediant is tonicized in 'Pet Sounds' (G major within B♭), and the minor submediant is tonicized in 'Here Today' (F♯ minor within A) and 'Caroline No' (B♭ within [D♭]). With the exception of 'God Only Knows', which moves up a fourth (amid key ambiguities), every song on *Pet Sounds* that has a key change or even a hint of a different tonal centre, however brief, uses essentially the same tonic–submediant relation.

30 Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians*, 122–3.

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Only the intra-album thematic aspects of these key relations were new to Brian Wilson at this stage of his career; earlier Beach Boys albums are filled with tonal mobility of different kinds and over various distances. This, of course, includes concluding upward semitonal shifts, like in 'Surfer Girl' (1963) and many others, but also songs that shift earlier and by larger distances, such as the whole-tone movement back and forth between verse and chorus in 'Finders Keepers' (*Surfin' USA*, 1963), presaging the same procedure in 'Don't Worry Baby' (*Shut Down Volume 2*, 1964). Third relations appear in a cover of the Gamblers' 'Moon Dawg' on the Beach Boys first album (*Surfin' Safari*, 1962), and in Brian Wilson songs such as 'The Surfer Moon', 'Boogie Woodie' (both on *Surfer Girl*, 1963), and 'Keep an Eye on Summer' (*Shut Down Volume 2*, 1964). A specific precedent for the key relations of *Pet Sounds* is 'Your Summer Dream' from *Surfer Girl* (1963), which moves to the major submediant for the bridge. Third relations were not unheard of in popular music of that time – the Four Seasons featured the major submediant in 'Ronnie' and 'Big Man in Town' (1964), for example – but to a gifted songwriter weaned on the jazz harmony of the Four Freshmen, they were almost routine.[31]

The songs of *Pet Sounds* also expand and explore methods of motivic integration that begin to appear with regularity in Beach Boys albums of the preceding years. The *Today!* album of 1965 is often heralded as the 'pre-*Pet Sounds*' project, and one important aspect of this is the constructive detail often found within individual songs. 'Kiss Me Baby', for example, is virtually a fantasy on a scale step 4–3–2–1 motive, first heard in the wordless vocal introduction and then repeated in various guises in melody and instruments, representing the ubiquity of feelings as the lyric oscillates between regret ('Please don't let me argue anymore') and flashbacks to a painful lover's quarrel ('Can't remember what we fought about'). Likewise, 'Good to My Baby', also on the *Today!* album, begins with the four-part choral interplay of a four-note motive repeating the song title. A slightly modified version of this motive then appears in the guitars, and in the main verse melody. As the song unfolds, this motive becomes the primary accompanimental riff, repeatedly recalling the choral parts of the introduction like persistent proclamations of love.

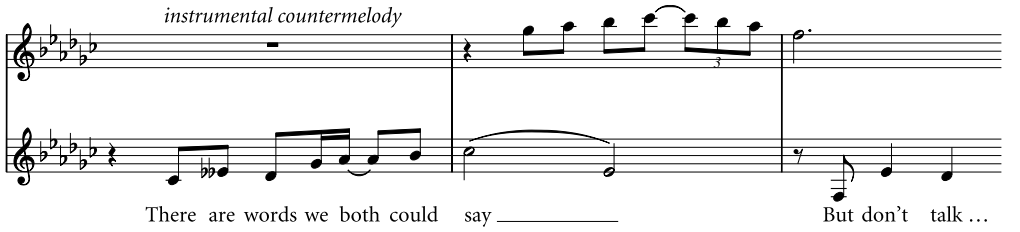
Such techniques are commonplace in *Pet Sounds*. The fourth song, 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)', for example, begins with the singer extolling the virtues of wordless communication with his lover: 'I can hear so much in your sighs | and I can see so much in your eyes'. As he then states the central message – 'There are words we both could say | but don't talk, put your head on my shoulder' – a piano and mandolin directly echo the melodic gesture, representing the ineffable feelings the lovers share. Example 1 shows Wilson's vocal line, rising stepwise from G♭ to C♭ on 'we both could say', and the instrumental response, also rising stepwise from G♭ to C♭ before stepping back down.[32] The importance of the motive grows as the song progresses, as it continues to reiterate its non-verbal message; and then, near then end, after the singer asks us simply to 'listen' and then fades into silence, the

31 For example, the major submediant is featured prominently in Four Freshmen arrangements such as 'The Day Isn't Long Enough' (*Freshmen Favorites*, 1956) and 'Got a Date with an Angel' (*Four Freshmen and Five Trumpets*, 1957).

32 In this and all other musical examples for this article, vocal lines are notated at actual sounding pitch. CD timings are consistent with the various recent releases of the album.

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motive is woven throughout an affecting string meditation. As a symbol of the lovers' inexpressible passion, it is what we have been invited to hear.



Example 1 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder'), motivic echo (0′ 16″).

But the motive not only echoes the vocal line of this song, it also relates to other songs on the album, becoming a thread helping to bind the cycle together. To hear this, we need only expand the motive to include not simply the stepwise ascent but also the overall arch shape that results when it begins to step back down. Despite its relative simplicity and likelihood of occurrence in a variety of contexts, the arch motive is pervasive and conspicuous enough in *Pet Sounds* to merit thematic distinction. A version of it is especially noticeable, for example, in the main guitar melody of the instrumental 'Pet Sounds' itself, as bracketed in Example 2a. This brings to mind the concluding organ figure of 'I Know There's an Answer', shown in Example 2b, and the lead vibraphone part in the second half of 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', Example 2c, which are arch shapes interlocking with their inversions (as bracketed in the example). We hear the same ideas in reverse – the inversion first, followed by the regular arch shape – at the end of 'Wouldn't It Be Nice', Example 2d, and throughout the instrumental lines of 'I'm Waiting for the Day', Example 2e. The flowing bass line at the end of 'God Only Knows', Example 2f, likewise, moves through interlocking inverted and regular versions of the arch motive. In the light of these inter-song relationships, we might even locate somewhat chromaticized versions of the arch shape (and its inversion) in the bracketed portions of the A section of 'Let's Go Away for Awhile' shown in Example 2g.

Motivic unity is also established in the lower register, in the form of bass lines that present some variant of a descent from step one down to five. Again the 'Pet Sounds' track presents one of the clearest versions of this descent, moving from B♭ down to F through A♭, G, and G♭, as shown in Example 3a. As this accompanies the motivic melody from the same song shown in Example 2a, the album's title track stands as a kind of repository of primary motivic elements. It was one of the first to be recorded (see Table 1 above), and apparently became a source of inspiration as the rest of the album was being conceived. The repeating bass descent of 'Here Today' shown in Example 3b, for example, melodically reproduces most of the 'Pet Sounds' line (1–♭7–6–♭6–5), differing only in certain chord choices (especially the secondary dominant on ♭7, rather than a ♭VII chord). Wilson seems to have been calling the listener's attention to this thematic element when he said in 1996, 'be listening for that trombone in the choruses'.[33] 'I Just Wasn't Made for These Times' begins with a bass descent

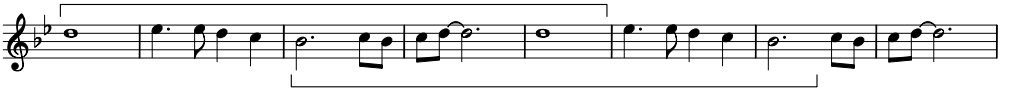
33 Leaf, booklet notes for *Pet Sounds Sessions*, 16.

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a. 'Pet Sounds', excerpt from main melody, guitar played through Leslie speaker (0′ 13″)



b. 'I Know There's an Answer', ending figure (2′ 43″)



c. 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', B section, vibraphone (1′ 02″)



d. 'Wouldn't It Be Nice', ending figure (1′ 58″)



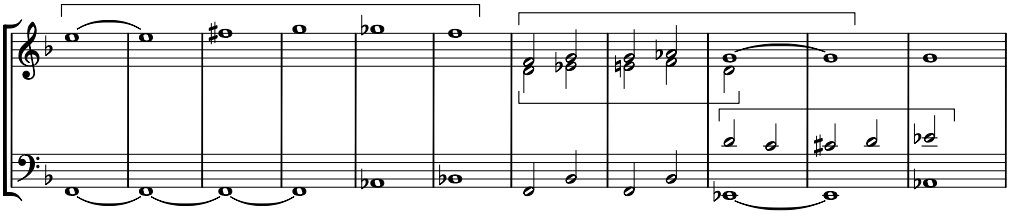
e. 'I'm Waiting for the Day', backing figure (0′ 05″, 0′ 58″, 1′ 50″)



f. 'God Only Knows', ending bass line (1′ 51″, 1′ 59″, etc.)



g. 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', variants of arch motive and bass line (0′ 00″)



Example 2 Arch motives.

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that also uses ♭7 instead of a diatonic seventh step but actually begins above the tonic, on step 2, as shown in Example 3c. This version also goes directly from step 6 to 5, avoiding the ♭6 of the previous two examples, all the while supporting complex harmonies that alternately suggest both stacked upper thirds (as shown in the interpretation below Example 3c) and suspended or decorative tones. The most expansive bass descent in the album occurs in the second half of 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', extracted in Example 3d. (This accompanies the arch motives shown in Example 2c.) This version is completely chromatic, moving by semitones downward through applied chords leading to IV^6 and iv^6, to a structural arrival on a tonic $^6_4$ chord on step 5. Although the chromatic descent continues downward past 5 to ♭5 and 4, the line eventually returns to 5 supported by a dominant chord, as if resolving an interrupted cadential $^6_4$, and the track ends with a repeating interplay between the dominant on step 5 and the IV^7 on step 4.[34]

Unlike other sources of unity in *Pet Sounds*, the bass descent does not reflect a recent preoccupation. To find precedents in earlier Beach Boys albums we must go all the way back to 'Heads You Win' on their first album (*Surfin' Safari*, 1962) and to 'Lonely Sea' and the cover of Dick Dale's 'Misirlou Twist' (in the middle section) on their second (*Surfin' USA*, 1963). These are all simple 1–7–6–5 descents as in natural minor, supporting parallel major triads, as in the opening of Jimmie Rodgers's 'Make Me a Miracle' (1958).[35] Wilson's more recent interest in this type of bass progression may have been sparked, however, by the Beatles' 'I'll Be Back' from the *Beatles '65* album, also a 1–7–6–5 pattern but with a more interesting harmonization, $i–v^6_5–VI^7–V^9$.[36] Indeed, Wilson's other important bass descent from the *Pet Sounds* era is the opening of 'Good Vibrations', which unfolds the similar progression $i–v^6_5–iv^6_5–V$. The bass descent would go on to become one of Wilson's favourite devices in his subsequent work, in both chromaticized and major diatonic versions.[37]

34 The chord on ♯4 is a half-diminished seventh sonority functioning like an augmented sixth chord, labelled here 'Lv^{+6}' after Walter Everett's 'Levittown sixth' designation (see Everett, 'The Learned vs. the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel', 112). Daniel Harrison discusses chords of this type, which he calls the 'dual German sixth chord', and its most notorious occurrence as the 'Tristan chord', in his 'Supplement to the Theory of Augmented Sixth Chords', Example 8f (reproducing an example from the *Harmonielehre* of Rudolf Louis and Ludwig Thuille). The label for this chord in Example 3d reflects Everett's terminology because of its resolution to the subdominant, as in the song that inspired the coinage – Billy Joel's 'Everybody Loves You Now' (1971). Harrison's terminology is, however, equally applicable, even if his discussion is focused on resolutions to the dominant (as in the *Tristan* Prelude).

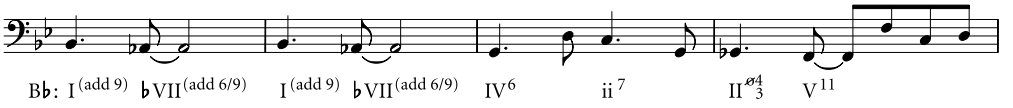
35 Wilson certainly knew other prominent bass descents from pop music of this time, including the Coasters' 'Three Cool Cats' (1959), i–VII–VI–V; Donnie Brooks's 'Mission Bell' (1960), I–♭VII–♭VI–V; the Ventures' 'Walk–Don't Run' (1960), i–VII–VI–V; and Del Shannon's 'Runaway' (1961), i–VII–VI–V. 'Lonely Sea' was apparently the first collaboration between Wilson and Gary Usher, who remembers supplying the chord progression using some 'Teddy-Bears-type chord patterns'; see White, *The Nearest Faraway Place*, 148; McParland, *The California Sound*, vol. 1, p. 40. Presumably, Usher is referring to the parallel triads (although not exactly the same kind of bass descent) in the bridge of the 1958 hit 'To Know Him Is to Love Him' for Phil Spector's group The Teddy Bears. Usher's song 'Driven Insane' (released as a single on TITAN 1716 45–TI–31 in 1961) recycles the Teddy Bears progression precisely.

36 The tonic chord moves back and forth between major and minor qualities. According to John Lennon, 'I'll Be Back' was itself inspired by Del Shannon's 'Runaway'; see Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians*, 243.

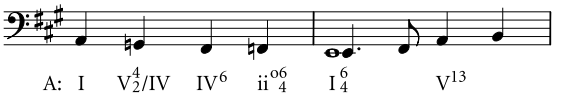
37 He became particularly taken with the major diatonic descent in songs such as 'Time to Get Alone' (*20/20*, 1969) and 'This Whole World' (*Sunflower*, 1970). Signature songs from his first two solo albums – 'Love and Mercy' on *Brian Wilson* (1988) and 'Your Imagination' on *Imagination* (1998) – employ diatonic descents through complete major scales (reminiscent of the Everly Brothers' 'Let It Be Me' (1960), and Dennis Wilson's 'Forever' on the Beach Boys' *Sunflower* album (1970)).

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a. 'Pet Sounds', bass line of A section (0′ 12″+)



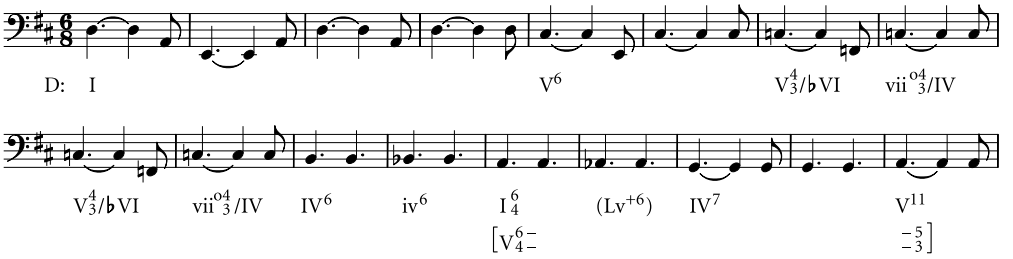
b. 'Here Today', bass descent in chorus (0′ 39″, 1′ 33″, 2′ 26″)



c. 'I Just Wasn't Made for These Times', opening bass line (0′ 00″)



d. 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', bass line of part two (1′ 02″)



Example 3 Motivic bass descents.

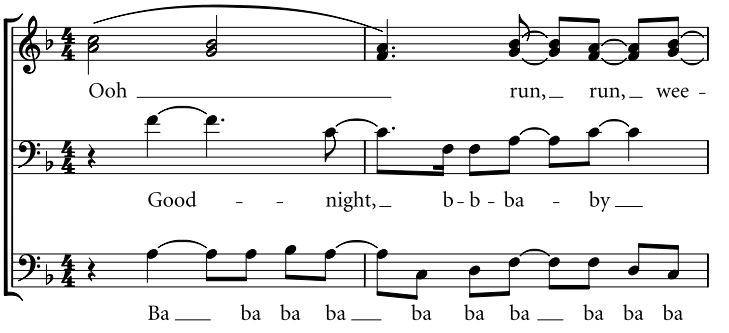
The structure and materials of individual songs from *Pet Sounds* offer further evidence of the consistency of its artistic vision and its position as a culmination of Wilson's career through early 1966. The opening song, 'Wouldn't It Be Nice', begins with an A major introduction, suggesting a dream-like fantasy that is suddenly aborted by a raucous drum-beat just before the F major verse begins. The aforementioned D major bridge later resumes the fantasy, suggesting a tonic response to the dominant of the A major introduction.[38] F major returns after the bridge, but the tempo slows as if trying to preserve the fantasy, even while recalling phrases from the earlier faster verse. Finally, the earlier reality does return, in an up-tempo, layered ending that Wilson had made his trademark, in songs like 'Surfers

38 This interpretation echoes the spirit, if not the exact key identifications, of a comment on this song by Walter Everett, who writes that 'the A major wish-fulfilling bridge "explains" the A-major introduction' ('Confessions from Blueberry Hell', 310).

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Rule' (*Surfer Girl*, 1963), 'Fun, Fun, Fun' (*Shut Down Volume 2*, 1964), and 'When I Grow Up (to Be a Man)' (*Today!*, 1965).[39]

The ending of 'Wouldn't It Be Nice', as excerpted in Example 4, exemplifies this layering technique at the pinnacle of its evolution. A vocal duet repeating the arch motive in the upper register (cf. Example 2d) floats above Mike Love's arpeggiation of the tonic triad in the middle register on the words 'goodnight baby', while a bass figure (bottom stave of the example), first heard in the segue to the bridge, surrounds F with A and D just like the key relations between verse, introduction, and bridge.[40] The layering portrays a restless teen spirit in search of independence and validation, as the lower parts forcefully reiterate the tonic harmony while the upper duet tries repeatedly, fruitlessly, to soar away. The different layers offer different perspectives on the subject at hand, like characters in a Mozart opera ensemble. In Wilson's experience, it is an outgrowth of the interplay between main melody and distinctive background vocals commonly heard in 1950s doo-wop, transported into the pop idiom.



Example 4 'Wouldn't It Be Nice', vocal layers in ending (1′ 58″).

The album's second song, 'You Still Believe in Me', retains much of its original spirit as a song about childhood (see above), in the 'music-box' effects of its instrumental arrangement, eventually combining harpsichord, guitars, and finger cymbals with a bicycle bell (starting at 1′ 27″) and squeeze-horn (first heard at 2′ 16″), and in the repeating, almost pervasive I–ii^7–V^7 chord progression. When the harmony does move elsewhere, it is to rest briefly on thematically significant submediant harmonies at 'you bring back your love to me' (vi) and at the end of the title-repeating refrain (♭VI). Asher's lyric pits the harmonic repetitions against the excursions, using the music-box material to represent the juvenile behaviour of the singer, while the motions to the submediant and elsewhere represent the more mature attitude of his beloved.[41] In the end, however, we hear only the music box and hopeless resignation, on the word 'cry' of 'I wanna cry' in four-part vocal texture. Example 5 shows

39 Two-layered endings, as in 'Fun, Fun, Fun', are very common throughout Beach Boys albums, but combinations of three or more vocal strands, as in 'Surfers Rule', 'When I Grow Up', and 'Wouldn't It Be Nice', are less common.

40 Mike Love apparently conceived the middle layer himself; see Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 91.

41 Asher recalls hearing the backing track alone 'on the first day of our collaboration' but never knowing the original words, and then taking home a tape of the track plus a demo tape of the melody and completing the new text on his own; see Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 92.

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one phrase of this repeating ending, based on a melody first heard in the introduction, hummed, plucked on piano strings with the damper pedal depressed, and subsequently repeated in the accompaniment throughout the arrangement. As the melody sequences down by thirds, over the I–ii^{7}–V progression in each bar, the lower voices gradually thicken the texture by breaking away from unisons. This is a rare instance in Wilson's work of a more internally cohesive style of counterpoint in which the voices present not contrasting perspectives, as just seen in 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' (Example 4), but stylistically uniform variants of similar material, as in a chorus of a Baroque oratorio or cantata.



Example 5 'You Still Believe in Me', one phrase of chorus (1′ 57″).

When the singer sets off on a journey from A to F♯ in song three, 'That's Not Me', his search for fulfilment is no more successful. But something has changed: the song ends in F♯, even though the character in the narrative has returned home. This concluding flashback reminds us that the journey has changed him. He may not be ready for his independence, but he has gained self-awareness and confidence and a new understanding of how much he must grow before he is ready to leave for good.[42]

The fourth song, 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)', is one of Wilson's most complex harmonic experiments.[43] While the repeating arch motive reminds us of the protagonist's unspoken feelings (see Example 1), the meditative chorale shown in Example 6, first heard in the organ, joined by a string ensemble in the second verse, projects the uncertainty of the song's lyric with a steadfast avoidance of strong tonic harmony. The opening E♭m^{7} chord recurs in first inversion (b. 2), and later in third inversion (b. 4), and ultimately becomes, in retrospect, a submediant harmony in the key of G♭. This happens after the progression passes through a tonic chord in first inversion in b. 5 and comes to rest on ii^{7} beneath the first arch motive in b. 6, leading to a V^{9} as the refrain begins in b. 7.[44] But the refrain simply moves back and forth between ii^{7} and V^{9} at first, then progresses to ♭VII^{9}, iv ♭, and ii$^{\text{ø}6}_{5}$, and any expectation of a conclusive resolution is denied when the refrain ends

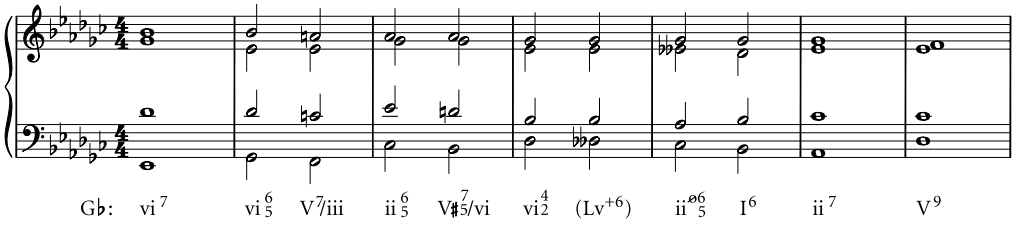
42 Timothy White interprets the lyric of 'That's Not Me' as a metaphor for Wilson's decision to abandon touring with the Beach Boys; see White, *The Nearest Faraway Place*, 255.

43 For more on Wilson's harmonic experimentation before and after *Pet Sounds* see Harrison, 'After Sundown'.

44 The second half of b. 4 of the chorale features another 'Levittown sixth' chord (see note 34 above).

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on a tonic $^{6}_{4}$ (on the last word of 'let me hear your heart beat'). This chord becomes the most powerful and poignant moment in the song – especially when it underlies the singer's pleas to 'listen' after the second verse – and yet it lacks the finality of root position.



Example 6 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)', verse chorale.

The subsequent course of the harmony in an instrumental meditation is summarized in Example 7. After the arrival on the $^{6}_{4}$ chord, a generally ascending bass line supports a series of cadential evasions using applied and mixture chords, finally concluding on a dominant harmony with a suspended fourth that resolves just as the voice re-enters. The entirety suggests a middle-ground expansion of the cadential $^{6}_{4}$–$^{5}_{3}$ as indicated beneath the example, like a more elaborate version of the interrupted cadential $^{6}_{4}$ seen earlier in 'Let's Go Away for Awhile' (Example 3d). This brings us no closer to harmonic closure, however, as the singer then repeats the opening of the refrain above the ii^{7}–V^{9} alternation, fading out after several repetitions. Wilson's harmony in this song is a true culmination of the trends he had been developing in earlier songs such as 'The Warmth of the Sun' (*Shut Down Volume 2*, 1964), 'Please Let Me Wonder', 'She Knows Me Too Well', and 'In The Back of My Mind' (all three from *Today!*, 1965). His use of chord inversion in particular has been singled out by his contemporary Elton John.[45] By early 1966 he had completely assimilated the harmonic practices of Four Freshmen records and had begun to craft a musical language that was both uniquely expressive and distinctly personal.

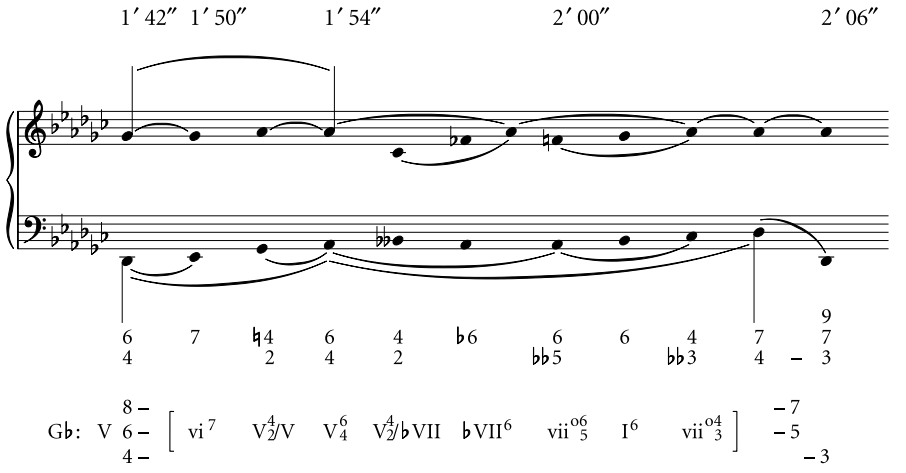
As the narrative shifts to the shortcomings of the beloved in song five, 'I'm Waiting for the Day', Wilson revives a song he had first copyrighted in 1964.[46] Elements of his earlier work are especially apparent in the chord progression leading into the hook (on the lines 'But when I could I gave strength to you | I'm waiting for the day . . . '), which duplicates, with small discrepancies, the progression from the corresponding portion of 'The Man with All the Toys' from the 1964 *Christmas Album* (on the lines 'A big man in a chair | And little tiny men everywhere').[47] The arrangement, however, is consistent with the *Pet Sounds* era,

45 'Brian Wilson has influenced me more than any other songwriter, whether it's English or American, because of the way he shaped his chords, the way – I'm getting very technical now, but he never used the root note of a chord [in the bass], he used the fifth or the third and changed the chord sound completely'; see the interview included as a 'special feature' on *An All-Star Tribute to Brian Wilson*, produced by David Leaf and Chip Rachlin (details in Filmography below). An earlier Brian Wilson song with an important second-inversion chord is 'Kiss Me Baby' (*Today!*, 1965), in the transition to the final fade.

46 See Doe and Tobler, *Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys*, 49. Doe and Tobler also say that Mike Love later obtained co-writing credit for amending 'eight words' in the lyrics.

47 The progression is IV–iv♭–iii–vi. Wilson had been using the IV–iv♭ alteration, echoing models from 1950s pop music, since one of his earliest songs, 'Surfer Girl' (e.g. on the words 'all un-done').

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Example 7 'Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)', summary of instrumental meditation.

featuring an English horn doubling of the main theme and the flute statement of both forms of the arch motive (Example 2e). Especially current is the passage for strings shown in Example 8, which occurs just before the song's ending and strongly recalls the string meditation, just discussed, in the previous song (Example 7). Again Wilson begins with a tonic $^{6}_{4}$, but instead of resolving to V in the manner of an interrupted cadential pattern, as in 'Let's Go Away for Awhile' and 'Don't Talk', he works his way up an octave in the bass via applied and mixture chords, only to arrive at another tonic $^{6}_{4}$ that moves directly to a tonic in root position for the beginning of the song's final section. The progression is shaped by wedge voice-leading, as the bass ascent is generally mirrored by upper descending lines, like a heavily chromaticized version of the wedge he had used in an unreleased song of 1964, 'All Dressed Up for School'.[48] Most significantly, the passage shown in Example 8 is one of the most concrete illustrations of the impact of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* on Wilson's work.[49] Wedges occur throughout the *Rhapsody*, not uncommonly supporting progressions such as this one, featuring different types of augmented sixth chord.[50] At this point in *Pet Sounds* the wedge interlude offers a moment of reflection about the girl's pain and heartbreak described in the lyric, before a final euphoric declamation from the narrator, offering comfort and reassurance.

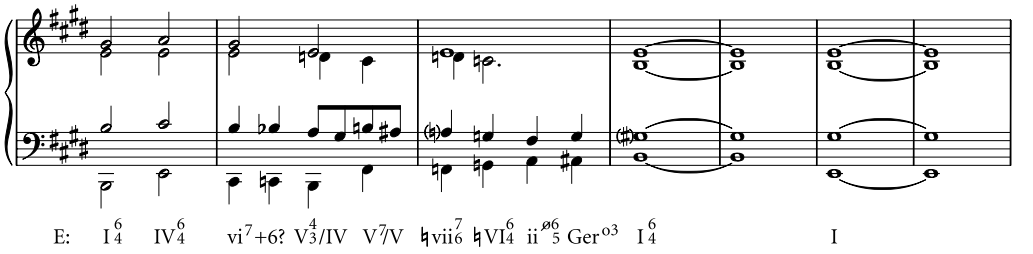
Side A ends with 'Let's Go Away for Awhile', serving as an instrumental introduction to 'Sloop John B'. As described above, the album's first instrumental number moves through the same keys as 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' to take the tonality down a minor third and stay there

48 'All Dressed Up for School' remained unreleased until the CD reissue of *Little Deuce Coupe* and *All Summer Long* in 1990. Wilson would use a very similar wedge later in 'Goin' On' (*Keepin' the Summer Alive*, 1980).

49 Voice-leading wedges are also prominent in several of the *Smile* tracks.

50 See, for example, the proliferation of wedges near the end of *Rhapsody*, just before the final 'Grandioso'. The chord on the second beat of the second bar of Example 8 looks, but does not resolve, like one of Gershwin's augmented sixth chords. It has the same structure as one cited in Harrison, 'Supplement to the Theory of Augmented Sixth Chords', Example 8c (reproducing an example from the *Harmonielehre* of Rudolf Louis and Ludwig Thuille). The chord on the fourth beat of b. 3 is a common inversion of a German sixth chord that does resolve in the traditional manner.

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Example 8 'I'm Waiting for the Day', string interlude (2′ 20″).

as in 'That's Not Me'. Its destination key, D major (see Examples 2c and 3d), then stands at a maximal tonal distance from the A♭ of 'Sloop John B'. Although some commentators have objected to the inclusion of a folk-song arrangement on the album, it is not that difficult to understand the logical function of 'Sloop John B' within the overall narrative.[51] Even its extreme contrast of style can be considered an element of its escapism. Its inclusion is also welcomed, if not justified, simply because it is one of Wilson's most compelling arrangements and productions. The flute in the introduction highlights neighbour motions that will be heard within the main melody and repeated within the backing instruments throughout. Late in the arrangement, one of Wilson's most melodic bass lines adds to the overall sense of accumulating complexity. In the second chorus the backing instruments drop out to leave only an a cappella chorale with interweaving contrapuntal lines to heighten the drama still further. Wilson had always included arrangements of existing songs on Beach Boys albums, and if *Pet Sounds* was to be no exception, then it is only fitting that that aspect too should be a culmination of his earlier efforts.[52]

With 'God Only Knows' at the beginning of side B, a poignant fatalism begins to set in. Even while expressing the depths of his love, the narrator contemplates the consequences of heartbreak: 'If you should ever leave me,' he sings in the second verse, 'the world could show nothing to me | so what good could living do me?'[53] Doe and Tobler quote an unnamed 'noted Beach Boys historian' describing 'God Only Knows' as 'the most beautiful suicide song ever'.[54] The song thus emphasizes the spirituality of love and the different ways, transcendent and tragic, that earthly beings might feel closer to their deity. Within the story of a love affair, it becomes a turning point towards the decline and dissolution heard throughout the songs on side B.

51 For example, Granata writes that 'Sloop John B' does not belong on *Pet Sounds* 'because it interrupts the program's pleasurable flow and destroys the notion of *Pet Sounds* as a bona-fide concept album' (*Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 98).

52 The first two Beach Boys albums have three covers/arrangements each, and all subsequent albums have at least one. In the albums just prior to *Pet Sounds*, Wilson sometimes used an existing song as a starting point for invention and experimentation. His version of 'Why Do Fools Fall in Love' (*Shut Down Volume 2*, 1964), for example, includes a surprising a cappella chorale that is clearly a precedent for the similar passage from 'Sloop John B'. His version of the Mystics' 1959 doo-wop classic 'Hushabye' (*All Summer Long*, 1964) cleverly combines one of the main melodies with the melody of the well-known Brahms 'Wiegenlied' in a way not found in the original.

53 A song by the same title by the early doo-wop group the Capris (1954), re-recorded around the same time by the Crystals (years before the Phil Spector group), conveys a similar message.

54 Doe and Tobler, *Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys*, 50.

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As Daniel Harrison has explained, the tonality of 'God Only Knows' hovers uncertainly between E and A major, starting with an introductory progression that anticipates the A major refrain but features a D♯ in the French horn melody that encourages hearing the A chords as IV in E.[55] Much of the verse progression makes sense in E, but we hear actual E major triads only in second inversion, and then the refrain pulls towards A again, over the bass line later repeated in the ending and shown in Example 2f. It is reminiscent of the circuitous establishment of G♭ major in 'Don't Talk', complicated further by the competition for key primacy. After the second verse an instrumental interlude featuring wedge voice-leading gives way to a repetition of the verse progression up a fourth, thus implying A major with hints of D. The return to E is accomplished over a bass that simply continues its stepwise descent instead of circling back (as it does in Example 2f); Harrison writes that 'there is no moment in rock music more harmonically and formally subtle than this transition'.[56] These artful tonal meanderings help convey the sense of wonder and mystery – and insecurity and fear – in the song's lyric.

Besides being the musical high point of *Pet Sounds* and the nexus of the narrative, 'God Only Knows' holds a unique position in Brian Wilson's creative evolution. He had written sensitive ballads before, from the early 'Surfer Girl' (1963) to 'The Warmth of the Sun' (1964) and 'Kiss Me, Baby' (1965), but the centrepiece of *Pet Sounds* is different. One reason for this is the song's instrumentation, which features accordions, French horn, and strings. An even greater new development, however, is its use of vocal counterpoint, as we saw earlier in 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' (Example 4) and 'You Still Believe in Me' (Example 5). The middle section of 'God Only Knows' (where the verse progression is repeated up a fourth) features the three-voice fugato shown in Example 9.[57] This exemplifies the 'opera' model of vocal layering, where each line offers its own perspective: Wilson's upper part is a melancholy sigh, soon joined by a smooth mid-range line on the syllable 'doo' and a more staccato lower part on 'ba'. The lines interrelate and fill rhythmic gaps in each other, in the manner of all good counterpoint, and then all come together at the end and slide up to an F♯ minor triad (at the point in the progression where the second verse asks 'what good would living do me?'), leading to a return of the refrain and the earlier solo texture.[58] Later, at the end of 'God Only Knows' we hear a contrapuntal interplay again, this time following the 'oratorio' model of internal cohesion, as shown in Example 10 (supported by the bass line shown in Example 2f).[59] Now the two lower voices are strictly imitative, while Wilson's upper obbligato restates the French

55 Harrison, 'After Sundown', 39–40.

56 Harrison, 'After Sundown', 39.

57 An early take of this passage (*Pet Sounds Sessions*, disc 3, track 18) featured only a saxophone playing the main melody, and no vocal parts.

58 This F♯ minor triad combines with the bass E♭ to form another example of the 'Levittown sixth'. In light of the frequency of this chord type in *Pet Sounds*, and in light of Billy Joel's personal connections to Beach Boys music (as the opening act for some of their concerts in the 1970s, and as one of the artists paying tribute to Wilson in a 2001 concert at Radio City Music Hall, for example), will future augmented-sixth scholars be inspired to correct the anachronism and rename this chord the 'Hawthorne sixth'?

59 A track on *Pet Sounds Sessions* (disc 3, track 26) shows that Wilson had at one point considered an even more elaborate contrapuntal layering for the end of the song, featuring additional lines and singers, all a cappella. In bandmate Bruce Johnston's words: 'It just got so overloaded; it was nuts. [. . .] Brian's right move was to get subtler' (Leaf, booklet notes for *Pet Sounds Sessions*, 32).

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horn melody from the introduction, with its key-mobilizing D sharps and D naturals. The contrapuntal detail in these two passages is unprecedented in Wilson's earlier work; nor does it have peers in his later writing. It imbues 'God Only Knows' with a reverential ambiance, as if bringing the listener closer to spiritual transcendence.



Example 9 'God Only Knows', vocal lines in middle section (1′ 13″).

In the second song of side B, 'I Know There's an Answer', we find full recognition of the direction of the narrative in the words of the refrain: 'I know there's an answer | I know now but I have to find it by myself.'[60] This is one of Wilson's most vibrant instrumental conceptions, featuring organ, tack piano, harpsichord, banjo, guitar, and bass harmonica. More so than any other song on the album, this one celebrates instruments and instrumental colours. Both the introduction and the extended ending (featuring the organ statement of the arch motive shown in Example 2b) are purely instrumental. The prominence of the instruments relegates the voices to a lesser role, giving emphasis to what the Beach Boys' leader has done 'by himself', in the backing track that the other groups members did not help create.

The next song, 'Here Today', also features an extended instrumental break in the middle, restating the main verse chord progression over a rapid-fire electric bass. Within the overall

60 This is the central theme to be conveyed, even if the complete lyric actually sends mixed signals. The song was originally written with Terry Sachen, the Beach Boys' road manager, as a meditation on drug use and abuse. Mike Love changed some of the words to avoid drug references, but he left others alone (e.g. 'they trip through their day and waste all their thoughts at night'). As a result, the lyric at first seems to say that people cannot thrive alone – without the help of psychedelic drugs – but then Love's refrain says that they can, by being more self-reliant and realizing their innate potential.

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Example 10 'God Only Knows', vocal lines in ending (1′ 59″).

narrative, the turn towards despair is now complete, in a dark lyric about the futility of romance. Wilson builds tension in the minor-submediant area by sequencing upward in five short phrases ('It makes you feel so bad | It makes your heart feel sad | It makes your days go wrong | It makes your nights so long | You've got to keep in mind . . .') and then releasing energy in full when the descending bass motive returns in the chorus (Example 3b). As commentators have noted, the musical energy of the chorus dissipates suddenly, in support of the lyric phrase 'gone so fast'.[61]

'I Just Wasn't Made for These Times' follows, with Wilson and Asher's personal message about alienation and disenchantment standing as a metaphor for the failed love affair. We

61 For example, see Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 106.

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sense the unease right away, when the song begins on an unstable chord built on step 2 of the scale (see Example 3c). Beyond that, the song communicates Wilson's preoccupation with progressivism; it says, in the composer's words, that he was 'too advanced' for his bandmates and would eventually 'leave people behind'.[62] The other-worldly electro-theremin in the backing track helps to convey this message; he had recently discovered the instrument and would soon use it again, famously, in 'Good Vibrations', and the following year in 'Wild Honey'. What announces his innovative vision most strongly, however, is the cumulative vocal layering in the chorus, as transcribed in Example 11. First we hear only the lower choral parts and middle vocal part ('Sometimes I feel very sad'); then, while these repeat, the lower vocal part enters ('Ain't found the right thing I could put my heart and soul into'); finally, the upper vocal line ('People I know don't wanna be where I'm at') joins the others for one more repetition. This is one of the most extreme examples of Wilson's 'opera'-style layering, with each part projecting its own distinct personality. Ironically, and in subtle support of the song's message, Wilson performed all of the vocal parts himself.[63]



Example 11 'I Just Wasn't Made for These Times', vocal layering in chorus (0′ 43″, 1′ 58″).

62 Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 108.

63 Other members of the group may have recorded vocal parts for the song at some point, but the final mix appears to feature only Brian Wilson.

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Commentators have found the penultimate track on the album, 'Pet Sounds', to be 'jarringly out of place' and 'overly busy'.[64] Certainly, the overall sound is different from that of the rest of the album, seeming to belong more with the orchestral 'exotica' of Les Baxter and Martin Denny than with its surroundings.[65] As a reflection on the music that precedes it, however, 'Pet Sounds' very much belongs. As already mentioned, the track contains all of the cyclic musical ideas found throughout the album, including a move to the major submediant, arch motive (Example 2a), and bass descent (Example 3a). It may be a small break from the narrative, but it works as a kind of musical synopsis. Further, it is also an effective counterweight to the dark pathos of what is to come.

The final song, 'Caroline No', finds the protagonist thoroughly heartbroken and disillusioned. He longs for a return to youthful innocence, not the complexity of adulthood – 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' in reverse. The harmony at first captures the sense of restlessness and melancholy by moving back and forth between A♭Madd6 (or Fm^{6}_{5}) and E♭m^{4}_{2} chords, providing no sense of key centre until a G♭ major triad arrives at the end of the verse, first in $^{6}_{4}$ position, then in root position with added notes above. This G♭ chord provides only an ephemeral sense of stability, however, eventually functioning as a pivot IV into the tonicized D♭ in the first phrase of the bridge. Overall, the song features tonal evasions of the sort heard in 'God Only Knows', involving competing tonal alliances, less like those of 'Don't Talk', in which a single key is consistently implied but never strongly affirmed. Meanwhile, the 'Caroline No' melody is filled with semitonal middle-ground upper neighbourings, like an arch motive stripped of its vitality. The verse phrases are alternately anchored on the notes F and G♭ (most notably at phrase beginnings and endings), and in the bridge these same notes fulfil structural functions in the upper voice-leading (G♭ on 'heart', F on 'cry' and 'sad', F♯ on 'why'). At the end of the song these musical elements simply recur as a flute–bass flute duet (in octaves) restating the melody of the verse, offering no sense of closure or resolution.

As the final song of *Pet Sounds* fades, Wilson surprisingly adds the bells of a train-crossing signal, a train approaching with whistle blaring, and the sounds of barking dogs (his pets Banana and Louie). After the train reaches its closest point and then travels on into the distance, the notes of its whistle sliding downward, we hear a noisy, mechanistic representation of the journey just travelled. The dogs, meanwhile, offer their own commentary – literal 'pet sounds' in response to the foregoing musical ones. Brian Wilson would go on to pursue even greater ambitions in the *Smile* project of 1966 and 1967, but his grandest plans would ultimately spiral downward along with his artistic stake in the group and sound he had created, and with his own psychological condition. A listener forty-odd years later can easily hear this final moment of *musique concrète* as a very personal metaphor for a pivotal moment in Wilson's career. The decades since *Pet Sounds* have seen unqualified successes – spurts of expert song writing in the 1970s, well received solo albums of the 1980s and 90s, public

64 Granata, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 108; Fusilli, *Pet Sounds*, 65.

65 See Otfinoski, *The Golden Age of Rock Instrumentals*, 3–5. Baxter was a film composer whose albums such as *Ritual of the Savage* sparked an interest in the mid-1950s in music believed to be (or promoted to be) inspired by non-Western cultures. Martin Denny followed, with an arrangement of Baxter's 'Quiet Village' that reached number four on the charts in 1959. 'Pet Sounds' does resemble 'Quiet Village' and Baxter's 'Pool of Love' (1959).

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performances in the early 2000s, and the *Smile* revival of 2004 – amidst periods of profound personal and professional struggles. Happily, Brian Wilson has emerged from it all as an unlikely rock and roll survivor, finally able to appreciate the impact he has had on later generations of songwriters and musicians. If he never again equalled his successes of the 1960s, he can nevertheless reflect comfortably on his crowning achievement of 1966, an album of extraordinary artistry and timeless appeal. One *Pet Sounds* is enough.

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