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With a "scrupulous sense of cultural context" (San Francisco Chronicle), White offers an engrossing portrait of the Beach Boys and their times--"a totally cool look at the seminal California surfing band and the culture that produced it" (Digby Diehl, Playboy). of photos.

The Nearest Far Away Place: Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys, and the Southern California Experience Details

Date : Published April 1st 1996 by Henry Holt & Co (P) (first published 1990)

ISBN : 9780805047028

Author : Timothy White

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Music, Biography, Nonfiction, History, Rock N Roll



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From Reader Review The Nearest Far Away Place: Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys, and the Southern California Experience for online ebook

Jesse says

One of my all-time fave rock books. White doesn't dispense with the Wilson family drama, but uses them as a springboard into a grand American story, grandly researched, grandly realized. There's no shortage of Murry Wilson stories, but go elsewhere for the details about the "Smile" myth (that's what Dominic Priore is for) and session details (the Day-By-Day Chronology is good for that) and every last Wilson/Love battle. Instead, get down with White's version of the Beach Boys' story -- which, I'm convinced, is the one true story. That is, it's a beautiful evocation of what exactly Brian Wilson was expressing, consciously and unconsciously, with all the surf and sunshine and harmonies. I've read it at least 3 times, and I'm sure I'll come up with an excuse to go back. It's a nice place to be.

Sara says

I am not that far into this but I think I am giving up on it. It's not that bad, and I am kind of interested in the SoCal 50's/60's scene because I think my dad grew up right around that area, at that time (LA suburbs). But the writing is a little dry and not very engaging, and it's taking a really long time to get to any of the actual Beach Boys stuff. And there's not even a whole lot of actual Beach Boys in it so far - lots of digressions. I mean, it started with Brian Wilson's ancestors, as in great-grandparents. If I had nothing else to read, this would not be too painful (and I would like to get to the crazy B Wilson on drugs part), but with so many books and so little time, I think I will move on.

Christopher Rush says

This is a pretty full work, as most people already know. It's not a quick biography of the people in the subtitle, since it takes over a hundred pages for Brian to be born. Context is king in this work: context of the Wilson family, context of the California experience, context of the cultural factors going on during the Beach Boys era (mostly the "golden age" era). I'm not sure it was intentionally on his part, but Mr. White makes a stark contrast of the Beach Boys and the beach life - too much anger, too much pain, too much disappointment passed down from generation to generation; not only was Brian not made for these times, but the "Beach Boys" were not made for the "beach." When they tried to break away (so to speak) from their early, false image, the fans, the record label, the Decision Makers wouldn't let them. Somehow, their most creative and experimental era ('67-'73 or so) is their least popular, and from the mid-'70s on, they are stuck being a Greatest Hits band mostly against their will. The beach is all about freedom, fun, good times - and though the BB sing about these all the time, this life was effectively denied them (one generation to the next).

This is not precisely Mr. White's viewpoint, but it seems to be there, underneath, and not too deeply. This is also not to say the Beach Boys never had any good times in their lives or that they didn't enjoy making and playing the music, but Mr. White as so many other biographers do conveys the perpetual sense of pressure,

disappointment, self-recrimination, artificial stimulation excess, psycho-physical-emotional breakdowns, and almost miraculous survival through it all. It's truly miraculous Brian Wilson is still with us (as of this writing), having gone through no fewer than three life-shattering epochs, even one of which most of us could not handle let alone all three. And that does not even count the deaths of his brothers and the British Invasion, any even that seems like a mere irritation in the lifespan of the Beach Boys.

As I said, all of those comments are undercurrents - none of that is White's point or emphasis. His is an optimistic work, despite the generational heartache, especially as it reached its completion in 1994, shortly after Brian achieved his final and permanent freedom from "Dr." Landy. If you want to know what "The California Experience" was like in the first 2/3s of the 20th century, this work will likely never be surpassed (surely no one will ever locate let alone read the Cali-centric tomes, pamphlets, magazines, and miscellany in the bibliography). This work (calling it a "book" seems a derogation) brings to vivid life what the subtitled individuals experienced in that time, doing so in an accurate and openhearted perspective that puts the pessimistic view of Nathanael West to shame. It's not an easy read (and not just because of the sorrow), but if these subjects interest you, this is among the top-tier "must reads" of Beach Boys lore.

Bob Breckwoldt says

Lots of interesting historical facts and summaries of California form the thirties to the sixties. It tells the story of the Beach Boys and Brian in particular, with a good dose of journalistic depth but often appears as an amalgam of earlier pieces he wrote from the 70's and 80's, (which were better written) yet misses what is fascinating both musically and personally about each member of the band. Really only for fans and not a book you would often return to.

Dan Arnold says

Probably the seminal book on Brian Wilson and his band. California seeps out of the pages as you are taken on a trip through the Golden State's coming of age in the 20th century. The sunny, soaring harmonies of Brian Wilson's creations musically personify that California dream that is always just beyond reach. Amazingly well-researched.

Garrett Cash says

By far the greatest work I've read on The Beach Boys, and one of the very best on the 1960's music world and California. *The Nearest Faraway Place* is a deep read in a way that many non fiction music books scarcely attempt. Instead of making a passing reference to say, the hot rod craze that took place from roughly '62-'64, White will take out five pages or so to seriously consider the history and sociological context of such elements in the narrative. Some reviewers have complained about the extended family history White considers before he even arrives at Hawthorne, CA in the 1940's. To me, this is precisely what makes this work so extraordinary and unique. The book truly feels like a long journey, not only concerning particular individuals or musical development, but of a collective myth that grows and lingers on with time.

Mayta Quix says

A very dense reading, in terms of the contextual information offered throughout this book - e.g stories on the origin of skateboarding - which is most welcomed - especially the tracing back of the Wilson family origins - . However, I find this at times distracting from the main casts of the story. Although the history of Beach Boys is well known to be a tumultuous one, I tend to feel that the book merely gives brief snippets to the conflicts and upheavals experienced by this band rather than providing valuable/novel insights on them, which is rather disappointing, considering the creed of the author.

Peter Burton says

A very thorough look at the West Coast music explosion of which the Beach Boys were a crucial part. A bit too long for me with its exploration of every item of Southern Californian pop culture from hot rods to surfing to music but a book for specialists.

Brad B says

A lovely book, nearly poetic at times. The author clearly loves his subject but he still looks at the members of The Beach Boys with a critical eye. The family history and the descriptions of Southern California culture add interesting context to the Beach Boys' work. I dearly wish Timothy White were still alive, perhaps he would have written an updated version of this book. I'll be seeking out more of Mr. White's writings. Highly recommended not only for Beach Boys fans but for anyone interested in 20th century American music.

Stephanie Soltes says

This is THEE Beach Boys book to read about their early lives and band mates and recording, and turning into this great Southern California band. Terrific details about Brian that make you understand their music that much better.

More about their early lives, Brian and his father's problems, how they never seemed to get along, because his father had this intensity about the direction the band should go, and was so forceful about his decisions that would really destroy the band's ownership of their own songs. And there are happy periods too, not just horrible things. It makes you appreciate their music all the more.

Kirk Kiefer says

A strange beast; much of the book goes into extreme detail on the pre-Beach Boys history of the Wilson family. And by "extreme detail" I mean White talks about how Brian's ancestors made the trip to California and the like. That's all well and good, but I can't say it really adds much to the story for me.

There is a lot of interesting information not found elsewhere, as White had access to Brian during a particularly strange time (when Brian was under the care of the notorious Dr. Eugene Landy), but there's also

a bit of white-washing. Anyone who has heard the album Beach Boys '85 knows it's dire, but White hails it as a return to greatness, seemingly to give the book some kind of happy resolution.

***TUDOR^QUEEN* says**

This extensively researched tome by Billboard's Editor-in-Chief Timothy White tells the story of The Beach Boys while integrating California history of the period. The book was extremely tedious in the beginning; too much minutiae about the Wilson's ancestors and their migration from Sweden to Kansas and finally to California. I don't mind background history, but this was a little bit more than I wanted to know. Ditto for other sections of the book regarding aqueducts, the evolution of the surfboard and surfing itself. I craved for Beach Boys information and would have preferred culling these parts out of the "California Saga". The actual story of The Beach Boys didn't start until page 85. However, the author provided new and interesting commentary on The Beach Boys, which made this book well worth the read. The thorough recounting of how the Wilson's father and manager Murry Wilson lost his eye in a work accident was riveting. Another section transcribed the dialogue that occurred during an infamous recording session that a drunk and unwelcome Murry Wilson crashed. This conversation illustrates Murry's frustration and jealousy towards Brian and his advancing record production skills. Also fascinating was a glimpse into a day circa 1976 with Brian Wilson at his home. Shattered mentally, he is being babysat by his cousin Stan Love (at a purported salary of \$50,000 a year). Mr. White's mammoth research efforts shone with gems like these. Although I was occasionally frustrated with the peripheral California pap, I have to admit the invention of the hula-hoop by the Wham-O Manufacturing Company was a pleasant nostalgia trip. But to maintain my sanity I was forced to page through other non-Beach Boy sections of the book.

Kirk says

This is a very poetic history of the Beach Boys---if you want dirty details about who did what drugs while zoomin' someone else's wife, check out Steven Gaines's bio. This one makes a fine case for the BBs being an expression of californimythification (please don't sue me, Flea). If you think it's a stretch to connect Steinbeck to Brian Wilson, Tim White will convince you (as will the song "California" on HOLLAND). I also like this book because it gives due credit to SUNFLOWER, which, in my humble and probably worthless opinion, is second only to PET SOUNDS as the band's greatest. It also includes some revamped/revised profiles written for CRAWDADDY in the mid-70s, around the time of 15 BIG ONES. This was Dennis W's zenith, and White nicely reminds us that The One Who Was Charles Manson's friend was more than The One Who Was Charles Manson. Long live PACIFIC OCEAN BLUE!

David Ward says

The Nearest Faraway Place: Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys, and the Southern California Experience by Timothy White (Henry Holt and Co. Inc. 1994) (780.92). This Beach Boys tome has received seriously mixed reviews. Suffice it to say that it contains detailed background info on the Wilson clan and other tidbits about America's favorite summertime rockers. My rating: 7/10, finished 9/1/2010.

Nick H says

After reading all of the currently available Beach Boys fodder, I was pleased to pick this up in hardback off of ebay. I'm struggling between loving this book and being annoyed by this book. It doesn't flow very well at all, for a biographical piece. It really felt like it was all over the place. However, I did find interest in the roots of Brian's family in Hutchinson, KS, and the personality types from whence he came. It is a scary thought to think what would have happened had Murry's dad not packed up the family to head to the west coast. We may not have ever been given the opportunity to appreciate Brian's craft. Beyond that, Timothy White seems to have had a very insider's look at the BB's in the late 70's and 80's when things got really weird. This is an era that is not often written about, a most of the glamorous stories are based around the '60's/Pet Sounds/SMiLE era stuff. So, it was nice to read some deeper insights on what was going on with the band as the decades went on. Overall, an enjoyable read.
