

Tokyo International Forum
22nd February 2002

Brian Wilson
Presenting Pet Sounds Live

A bizarre, yet life enhancing concert.

In 1966 the Beach Boys released their Pet Sounds album. It is still considered by many in the business as one of the all-time great albums. Brian Wilson wrote and composed most of the songs on the album, and also produced and arranged it. And it was an album with which Wilson reached a creative peak as after its release health conditions eventually forced him out of the music business until the late 1990s. From 2000, Wilson starting performing songs from Pet Sounds in concert in the USA and UK, followed by his performances of the same songs in Japan.

To see Brian Wilson in concert considering the health issues he had been through was a chance too good to miss. But there were concerns. After all, this was not a Beach Boys concert; it was Brian Wilson with a band raising the question of who would sing on the songs that Wilson didn't originally lead on, such as "God Only Knows". The answer to that question was Wilson sang all the songs. At times his voice was not quite there, at times it didn't seem quite in key, but it was definitive and memorable.

Bizarrely, the concert started with a video about the Wilson and the Beach Boys. As I watched this video, which lasted for around 30 minutes, I wondered what the concert organizers were trying to say to us, the audience. It would have been appropriate for somebody who only had the faintest idea of who Brian Wilson is and what the Beach Boys were. But were any of those people here?

The result of the tedium brought on by the video was one Japanese man letting out a long scream of protest just as the 30 minute video came to an end, with mumbles of agreement from several around me. However, Wilson and his band were greeted with a roar as he lumbered out to front mid-stage and took his seat behind a keyboard, facing the audience.

Then we were straight into it. "Here's a great song." said Wilson, before launching into

"Til I Die". "Here's a pretty song" he said, introducing another. "This is the greatest song the Beach Boys ever did." "Here's a song I wrote in my car. I wrote it in my car." Wilson introduced most of his songs with these and such similar short phrases and really, the few seconds that he took to say it were the only seconds the band got to rest between songs. They bounced from song to song, obviously enjoying themselves.

Wilson remained seated for most of the show. Midway through the first set he told us that the band would play two tunes, and that we were to listen carefully as they were beautiful. Wilson then turned his back on the audience and watched the band as they lived it up in the limelight, taking us through a spectrum of musical styles. Wilson hardly moved. He didn't seem to be taking a drink, just relaxing on the stage, occasionally clapping gently. After the tunes ended he turned around and without giving the band a chance to catch their breath they were into another Beach Boys song, and then another and then as the band were closing the song off Wilson stood up and without a glance to the audience he lumbered off-stage. "Were going to take a 15 minute break now" one of the band members told us.

The band came back on stage and Wilson followed, introduced as "The great Brian Wilson". Unbelievably, Brian and the band were even better in the 2nd half. They played some of the greatest pop songs ever written. "God Only Knows", "Good Vibrations" and "Caroline No." They didn't just play the songs; they put everything into them, performing them to perfection. It was during the second half of the concert I realized just how lucky I was to be there, listening to this heavenly pop music that Wilson had created from nothing. Brian and his band performed a couple of songs from his solo albums, then they came back to some more Beach Boys numbers including a wonderful rendition of "Barbara Anne", before leaving the stage again.

The band came back on for an encore and Wilson thanked us all, sat down and played a boisterous "Surfin' U.S.A." running straight into "Fun, Fun, Fun". They went off again. We stood and clapped them back on the stage once more. Wilson then introduced another 'beautiful' song, and surprised me with "Love and Mercy", my favorite song from his debut solo album. This was truly a fitting and sublime way to conclude the concert.

Chris Green