

## DVD

# 'Pet Sounds' reborn in surround

By Randy A. Salas  
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God only knows what rock history would be without the Beach Boys' "Pet Sounds" album. Among the most influential recordings ever, it inspired the landmark "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" by the Beatles — who, in turn, inspired (and frustrated) Beach Boys mastermind Brian Wilson.

With its daring instrumentation (harpichord, theremin, Coke cans, etc.), dense vocal harmonies and lush production, "Pet Sounds" was artistically ahead of its time. Now, technology might have finally caught up with the 1966 album thanks to today's release of a DVD (Capitol Records, \$24.95) that features an astounding remix of the recording in six-channel surround sound, in either Dolby Digital or DTS 5.1.

"The surround mix offers an even more unique way of hearing the record and overall the... sound is, I think, a revelation," said Mark Linett, who produced and engineered the 5.1 mix for the DVD as well as a stereo mix for a 1997 CD boxed set, both with Wilson's input. "It is amazing that improvements in the technology only make the musical quality and sonics of 'Pet Sounds' more apparent than ever."

Lest anyone pine for the old "Pet Sounds" sound, the DVD includes the original mono recording in addition to the newer mixes. But Linett was adamant that the surround-sound version is not a gimmick.

"We haven't created a better way to hear 'Pet Sounds,' just another way to experience the 'ride' that was created in 1966," he said. "The surround mix presents the album without any gimmicks, no vocals flying around the room and such. (Well, the train and the dogs at the end do move a bit.) Brian and I wanted the mix to feel the same even though it is now surrounding the listener rather than coming from one or two speakers at the front of the room."

And what an ear-opening difference it makes — from Wilson's wall-of-sound arrangement of the traditional sailor's song "Sloop John B" to an intimate a-capella version of "God Only Knows," one of seven bonus tracks on the DVD. Hearing the latter is like standing right in the middle of the harmonizing Beach Boys in the studio.

Another bonus is an alternative mix of the most Beach Boys-esque tune on the album, the opener "Wouldn't It Be Nice," without lead vocals. Call it six-channel karaoke.

"You can really get an understanding of just



The Beach Boys hang out at the zoo in a 1966 photo session for "Pet Sounds" — from left, Bruce Johnston, Brian Wilson, Mike Love, Carl Wilson and Alan Jardine; not pictured, Dennis Wilson.

how the intricacies of the backgrounds mesh perfectly with the track and the lead vocals to create the perfect record," said Linett, who has worked with Wilson for 16 years.

Marketed and packaged as a DVD-Audio, "Pet Sounds" offers much more than do most discs in that audio-focused format. A host of video-based features are aimed at the home-theater crowd, the folks most likely to have the six-speaker setup and other equipment needed to hear the album in surround sound.

Extensive liner notes (onscreen and in a 28-page booklet) provide track information, session-musician lists, lyrics and historical context — an ideal complement to the exhaustive four-CD boxed set from 1997, "The Pet Sounds Sessions." There also are photo galleries, original promotional films for the album and "Sloop John B," a 1997 music video for the latter and a 14-minute retrospective.

"Everyone wanted this release to be the ultimate presentation of this historic album, and to give the buyer everything that was possible in the new DVD-A format both visually and sonically," Linett said. "... There are even a few

surprises to be found that aren't on the track list, which I think is fun."

With its sparkling new presentation, "Pet Sounds" sounds better than ever, primed for a whole new generation to explore. And as the Beatles' Paul McCartney once famously noted: "No one is educated musically until they've heard 'Pet Sounds.'"

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9. The Real Cancun
10. The Terminator

## WIDESCREEN 101

### LESSON 3: WHAT IS OPEN MATTE?

When many widescreen movies are filmed, the entire frame (a ratio of 1.37:1, virtually the same as a regular TV screen) is exposed even though the director is using only the middle horizontal portion of it to compose the shot for theaters. Mattes are used — during projection or on the film — to mask the extraneous image at the top and bottom of the frame.

For the full-screen version of such films on DVD, the mattes are removed, creating an open-matte presentation. While it's better than pan and scan, which lops off part of the original image, open matte has three major liabilities: The composition of the image often looks odd, filming equipment or other things not intended to be seen are visible, and special-effects sequences are almost always panned and scanned.



In this scene from the widescreen version of "The Usual Suspects," note how pleasingly framed the image is as originally composed for theaters.



In the same scene from the full-screen version, note how the excess amount of head room and the police's lineup-room window at the top and bottom of the frame detracts from the shot. And that's the tip of the boom microphone hanging down in the upper left corner (near the 7-foot mark).

Randy A. Salas

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