

BEACH BOYS

In Which Mike Love Hangs 8½

by David Tipmore

I have just finished talking to a friend on the telephone. I had not spoken to her for three weeks and wanted to know what she was doing. I called and found out. She was rotten, she said. Everything was falling apart: her ex-husband was suing for custody of the children, her married lover had run away to the Caribbean, her 80-year-old mother-in-law had been found unconscious in a Jacksonville apartment, overdosed on Dilatin. As I listened to her recite the various recent disasters of her life, a song lyric inserted itself in my inner ear: "...we could get married...and then we'd be happy."

The lyric is from "Wouldn't It Be Nice" by the Beach Boys, who are, at the moment, on concert tour throughout the United States and Europe. My friend had not seen their New York concert, would probably not remember the lyric, and would most certainly laugh if she did hear it. The lyric is simply not true, she would argue.

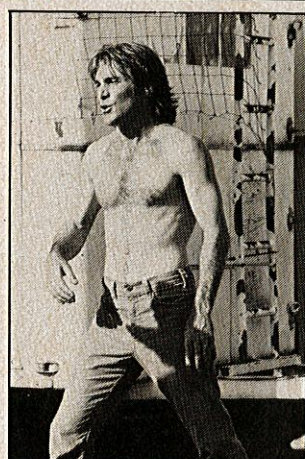
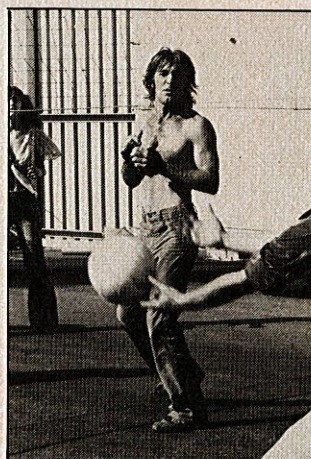
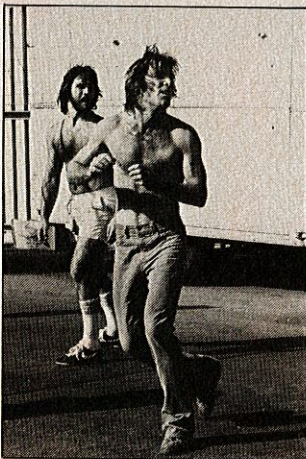
But it is very pleasant, I would answer. And so are the Beach Boys. They are the pleasantest rock group ever to face the footlights. Their harmonies reassure, their visuals do not threaten, their lyrics provide the most tender and comforting correlative ever rendered in rock. Barbara Ann, take my hand. I get around. Good vibrations. In my room. Their hearts were full of spring.

Because I had lost the capacity to believe in Barbara Ann and the solace of my room, because lately I had begun concentrating on Dixie cups in the gutters and dispossession notices in store windows, I went to hear the Beach Boys to try and regain what I remembered to forget. Or forgot to remember.

I am pleased to report that the Beach Boys are completely unchanged. They look the same, sound the same, act the same, still say "All right!" when the audience applauds. And the



Richard Creamer



Andy Kent (3)

audiences—all over, anytime—applaud fervently, almost reverently, as if they were giving a hand to the gods. Which, in a way, they are. The Beach Boys—and they will always be boys—have learned how to maintain both continuity and immortality in a culture which disavows both. It is an accomplishment to be applauded.

To try and understand how the group has maintained its appeal, transcended the flow, stayed in the swing of things, *whatever*, I went backstage at Madison Square Garden to have a little chat with Mike Love, the "one with the platinum tenor," as he refers to himself, the one who writes those lyrics about "...the worst trip I ever been on" in "Sloop John B."

Mr. Love is whimsical. Very whimsical. He is in person as he is on stage. "He's usually not like this," a beautiful girl sitting on the other side of him kept repeating, while she licked his shoulder. "I've never seen him this funny."

Of course I did not ask Mr. Love to be "funny." I merely asked him to be himself, but who was that?

Was he the expert on transcendental meditation who recommended the names of two books on the subject?

Was he the hater of cigarettes and other poisons to the body? ("Not only do I not like smoking—I hate it," said Mr. Love whimsically, after telling me the group had two Lear jets going to Europe: one for smokers and one for non-smokers.)

Was he the performer in the gold lame jacket?

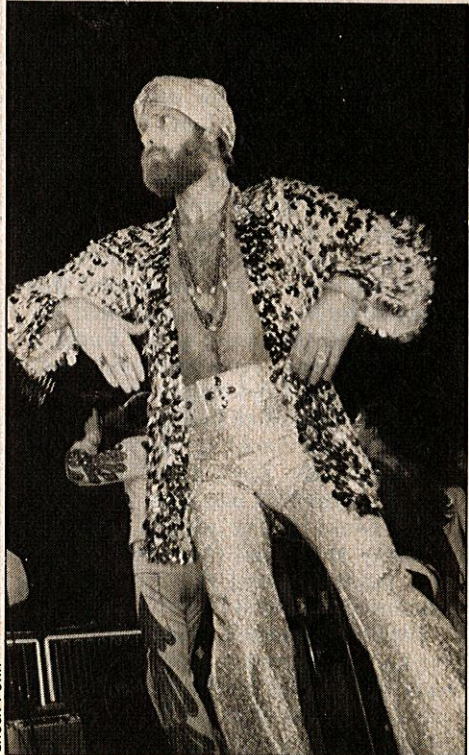
Was he the subscriber to the *Christian Science Monitor*? ("I think *Christian Science* is heavy, but in cases like bubonic plague you gotta have a vaccine.")

Was he the kid from the wrong side of the tracks of Hawthorne, California ("Baldwin Hills to be exact," he told me) who threw cherry bombs in the toilet of his high school?

Take your pick. I'll take the latter. As Mr. Love recounted various incidents from his youth—the annual Christmas caroling parties at cousin Brian and Dennis and Carl Wilson's with the Tom and Jerrys and egg nog punches, the Wednesday night Pres-



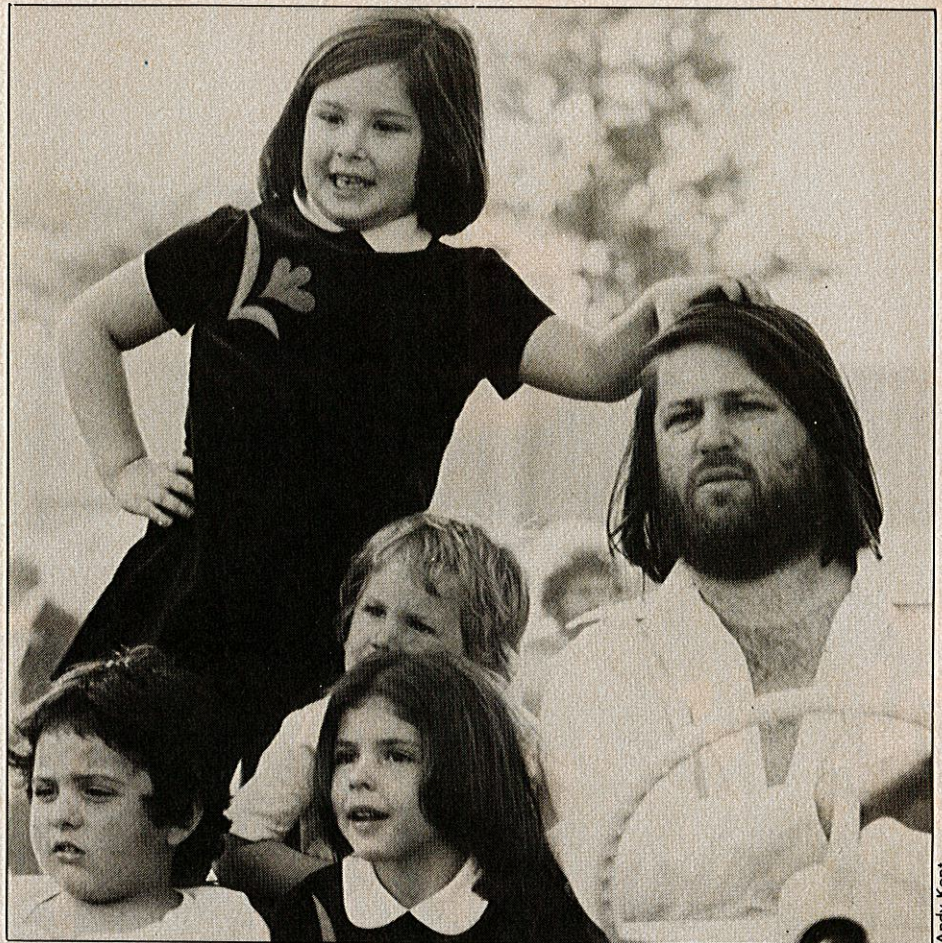
Everything positive, buoyant, uplifting — kids, turbans and football.



Chuck Pulin

byterian Church Youth Services at which the boys would sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" and then exit so they could sing Everly Brothers hits, the all-nighters at the Wilsons' house when the boys got so loud Mrs. Wilson would ask them to sleep in the car—it became clear that concentrating on such pleasant memories is what makes Mr. Love as "funny" and pleasant as he is.

And he is. Moreover, he can tell you why he is. When I asked him if he ever got bored singing the same songs for the last ten years he replied, "No,



Andy Kent



Richard E. Aaron

strangely enough. We'll rotate the songs or change the arrangements if someone really gets burned out. Actually the response of the audience makes it lively.

"See, we're dealing with positive, buoyant, uplifting subject matter," he went on to say. "And you can put your attention on something that's fun and lively and pleasant a lot longer than on something that isn't." Which makes a lot of sense. It's certainly better than concentrating on used Dixie cups in the gutter.

I asked Mr. Love about the power

that the Boys unleash in their concert. "I don't think we have any power over our audience," he offered. "We have the power to unleash carefully selected portions of ourselves which strike a resonant tone with the audience. I have a theory—well, an opinion anyway—about performing. A lot of people make records, right? You hear thousands of them every day. A lot of great recording artists. But when it comes to personal appearances"—Mr. Love can use phrases like "personal appearance" because he has been a *bona fide* rock

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are those songs that stand out due to their simplicity."

An example?
 "My Generation.' A lot of people don't understand that there's a big difference between what kids want on stage in relationship to what they actually go out and buy on record. Perhaps the reason why so many young kids can still get into the Who in concert is simply because it's a very zesty, athletic performance. However, if we just restricted our gigs to performing songs we'd just written yesterday and ignored all the old material then I'm positive that we'd really narrow down our audience tremendously.

"I dunno what's happening sometimes," he bemoans. "All I know is that when we last played Madison Square Garden I felt acute shades of nostalgia. All the Who freaks had crowded around the front of the stage and when I gazed out into the audience all I could see were those same sad faces that I'd seen at every New York Who gig. There was about a thousand of 'em and they turned up for every bloody show at the Garden, as if it were some Big Event—the Who triumph over New York. It was like some bi-centennial celebration and *they* were there to share in the glory of it all.

"They hadn't come to watch the Who, but to let everyone know that *they* were the original Who fans. *They* had followed us from the very beginning of it. It was *their* night.

"It was dreadful," Townshend recalls in disgust. "They were telling us what to play. Every time I tried to make an announcement they all yelled out 'Shhhrruppp Townshend and let Entwistle play 'Boris The Spider,' and, if that wasn't bad enough, during the other songs they'd all start chanting 'jump...jump...jump...jump...jump.'"

"I was so brought down by it all! I mean, is this what it had all degenerated into?"

"To be honest, the highest I've been on stage last year was when we used to play 'Drowned.' That was only because there was some nice guitar work in it...Roger liked singing it and both John and Keith played together so superbly. Really, that was the only time I felt that I could take off and fly." 🐼

(This is an interview in two parts. Next ish Townshend takes on Wakeman, the Beatles, ELP, to name a few, and reveals more of the why and where of the Who.)

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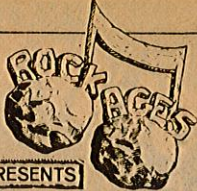
star for over a decade—"I like to see that group or that person *entertain* me. Show me something different. That's

why I wear my gold lame jacket and turban. Even though Carl dresses pretty spiffy, too, the rest of the group doesn't care so much. Of course just because Al Jardine hasn't changed his underwear since the Japan tour in '65...I mean you can't ask for everything."

Mr. Love is, of course, being whimsical. But he is not being whimsical when he discusses the phenomenon of a group of young California guys, who, when they weren't on the beach, were learning four-part harmony around Brian Wilson's piano. "I'm sure some kids thought we were strange—I mean, we took it seriously and auditioned lots of people for the group—but we played sports and dated a lot and kept everything in balance. I ran track and chased girls. My lyrics were like a microcosmic manifestation of whatever was going on in Middle America at that time."

With an important exception. "We had access to the beach, which is great. If you don't have very much money—which I didn't—one of the best ways to have fun I know is to go to the beach. Ride the waves, play with a Frisbee, look at the girls. You know: hang out."

Hang out. Have fun. Positive, buoyant, uplifting. But what does one do with the *art* of rock in this context, the social conscience, the burgeoning call for *intellect* in rock? Mr. Love had the



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