

ART AND CREATIVITY
CONVERGE IN MIAMI

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A NECESSARY Q&A WITH
JAMES EARL JONES

AMERICAN MAY

JULY 2016

Believe In Me

The newfound
confidence
and social
consciousness of

**DEMI
LOVATO**



By Adam Pitluk

What I'd Be Without You

Here's a bold statement: This month's cover story on Demi Lovato is one of the best — if not the best — profiles we've run in my eight-year tenure as the editor-in-chief of this magazine.

As you'll see on page 46, Demi didn't volunteer to be a spokesperson for her generation. She didn't raise her hand to be the dial-a-quote celebrity commenting on the perils of teenage eating disorders, and she didn't sign up to be everyone's Big Sis; the venerable voice of reason, as it were. After all, she's only 23.

No sooner had I finished reading about the trials and tribulations of young Demi Lovato than I got a text from my mother asking if I'd like to go to the Brian Wilson concert in Dallas later that night.

"Not particularly," I texted back. "School night for the kids and I'm pretty tired."

"He's playing *Pet Sounds* in its entirety," she wrote back. "I know how much you've always loved *Pet Sounds*."

All you young Demi Lovato fans, let me teach you some music history: Brian Wilson is the genius behind The Beach Boys, a band your parents, grandparents and, ugh, great-grandparents used to groove to back in the day. As co-lead singer and songwriter for the band, Brian was essentially responsible for the entire California-surfer-dude movement. The Beach Boys recorded their seminal album, *Pet Sounds*, 50 years ago. It was monumental. It was so monumental that Paul McCartney said this: "I've often played *Pet Sounds* and cried. It's that kind of an album for me." As a writer, I can promise you that eliciting emotion from a person is extraordinarily hard. Moving someone to tears is even more so. But moving a Beatle to tears? That's quite the compliment. After all, Brian Wilson was only 23 when he recorded it.

"I'll meet you there!" I texted Mom. "Will you be my date?"

Please keep this in mind: The Brian Wilson we were going to see that night

was not the same Brian Wilson who wrote *Pet Sounds* a half-century ago. His tumultuous life has been well documented over the years, as have his substance-abuse issues and mental-health concerns. Eerily, he was Demi Lovato's predecessor, both in terms of talent and self-destructive behavior. But Demi, just like Brian before her, turned it around.

Inasmuch as Demi fans would never miss a chance to see her perform *Unbroken* live, Beach Boys fans — nay, music fans — would never miss a chance to see Brian Wilson perform *Pet Sounds*.

My uncle, Jerry Weiss, is Brian's assistant. He knows what a huge fan my mom is of The Beach Boys (he is, after all, married to her Little Sis), so he arranged to get Mom and me backstage.

With only 10 minutes until curtain, Uncle Jerry led me and my date, the prettiest gal in all of Dallas, backstage to meet one of the most artistic, most cerebral songwriters of all time. We meandered through the maze of backstage commotion that accompanies a major world tour. After many sharp rights and toe-tripping cable bundles, we were onstage, or in an offshoot thereof.

There he sat like a sage professor, a legend clad in black on an overstuffed black-leather chair positioned against a black curtain, in the darkness. A flimsy table was set up with a lone lamp casting a soft white light beside him. Brian Wilson was finding his focus, alone in the dimness of a cavernous concert hall. Something else that's well documented is that he has horrible stage fright and crowd anxiety. But he's beloved and he knows it: He has an acute awareness of his social responsibility to an admiring public. Brian Wilson wants to give his fans the proverbial ride down Pacific Coast Highway, circa 1966, even though that prospect scares the hell out of him.

Uncle Jerry approached him delicately. "Brian, this is my sister-in-law and her son. They're excited for the show tonight."

He snapped out of a quasi-transcendental state and addressed Mom and me. "Oh,



FAMILY STYLE: Only 10 minutes before the show: Adam Pitluk, Brian Wilson and Sharon Kagan

hello," he said. "Thank you for coming."

We were tongue-tied.

"Do you mind if they get a picture with you?" Uncle Jerry asked on our behalf.

"Sure thing. Gather 'round."

And while Uncle Jerry snapped our picture in the preconcert backstage dark, I thought about the Demi Lovato cover story that I'd read earlier in the day. So many parallels. So much talent. Such pain. I thought that there's no reason why she couldn't be entertaining an amphitheater of thousands when she is 74, just like Brian.

"Thank you, Brian," I stammered. "This is really meaningful for Mom." We turned to exit stage right. I stopped. "And for me."

I saw him smile and nod his head as he went back into a meditative state.

Here's another bold statement: Hearing Brian Wilson perform *Pet Sounds* with my mom in its entirety in 2016 — 50 years after it was recorded, 10 years before I was born — was the best concert I've ever seen in my life. It was a moment Mom and I will share together. Forever.

As a parent who's been around the block a few times myself, and someone who has also experienced staggering sadness, I hope Demi Lovato is reading this.

After all, if I had let life's little digs keep me from taking the prettiest gal in all of Dallas to the best concert of our lives, what would my life have been like in the hereafter?

God only knows.

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