Good Vibrations
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IN THE MID-1950S, as rock ’n’ roll began to dominate sales charts, popular-music recordings increasingly played with the boundaries of “song” and “sound effect.” Spoken interludes, as in Mickey and Sylvia’s “Love Is Strange” (1957), had singers briefly enacting a dramatic scene. New types of radio presenters (DJs) brought their broadcast shtick to the recording studio, introducing songs with affected speech and Foley effects familiar from radio shows (e.g., the Big Bopper’s “Chantilly Lace,” 1958). The “hootin’ and hollerin’” of amped-up blues infiltrated other genres, including instrumental ones (Duane Eddy’s “Rebel Rouser,” 1958). Finally, “novelty” numbers of the era could show off recent advances in recording arts and science with a heavy application of production effects (viz., “The Flying Saucer,” 1956).

By the time the Beach Boys recorded their second single, “409” (first recording, according to Badman 2004: April 1962), Brian Wilson and cowriter Gary Usher were familiar with all of these developments. And while starting a track with the sound of a revving engine may not have been original with them, that they showed an interest in “sound effects” in only their second release shows noteworthy flexibility about what might be put on a record besides music. This flexibility has characterized the music of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys ever since, well after car songs were faddish and their topical repertory fresh.

Readers who are curious, but not (yet!) fans will be introduced in this chapter to songs that have rarely been anthologized throughout the fascinating history of Beach Boys’ compilation albums; familiar standards, like “409,” will be refreshed. Some of the “new” songs will likely come off as immature, weird, strangely hooked, unpolished, unfinished,
psychedelically sketchy. Some were filler tracks on the pre–*Pet Sounds* albums and aren’t really songs in the traditional sense (and have never been anthologized). Yet none fail to show off something characteristically interesting if not admirable about the Beach Boys. If curiosity is piqued by the foregoing description, readers might avail themselves of a Spotify playlist I’ve prepared of the songs referenced here and check out the unfamiliar ones before continuing. Fears that you are in for a Gidget-movie hell of surf guitar, woodies, and deuce coupes will be quickly dispelled. But you’ve been warned.

For the fan who knows the catalog well, this chapter will pull together songs from various depths and eras, and it will bring to mind, if not point out, the large range and varied types of sound effects. It will also juxtapose well-known and thought-about songs in (I hope) interesting ways. It will make the case that the revving engine, chanting cheerleaders, and affected surfing and hot-rod lingo is of a piece with the crashing waves in “Diamond Head,” the fabulist of “Mt. Vernon and Fairway,” and the copper’s cry in the cantina of “Heroes and Villains.” And this is not even to mention production and postproduction effects layered on in the studio, of which Brian was an industry-leading master in the mid-1960s. The reverb of the surf guitar is of a piece with the thrumming cello of “Good Vibrations.” An interest in “effect through sound” is a red thread throughout the Beach Boys catalog as well as in Brian’s solo work. For present purposes, I want this chapter to demonstrate a mutuality of the “song” and “nonsong” sounds. It can’t help but to be appreciative of it as a significant achievement in popular musique concrète.

As I developed these ideas and appreciations, I revisited ideas about the title of the Beach Boys’ most widely acclaimed album: *Pet Sounds*. What makes the second word of the title so apt? Why not *Pet Songs* or *Pet Music*? What about the first word: *Favorite Sounds*? *Special Sounds*? (The cover art famously didn’t rule out *Mammalian Sounds*!) The out-of-focus title seems to describe a feature of a certain kind of sonic life, one blessed with curious ears and talent for imitation and innovation, and one also characterized by a playful and innocent disposition. In the end, I concluded that, with Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, there is no sound that can’t be a pet sound. And I put that insight into the title of this chapter.

The analytic approach taken here is primarily hermeneutic, in that the sound effects are presumed to be meaningful and open to interpretation. Some effects are rather specific and authorial intention easily inferred, either from the context of the song or—insofar as known—
from contexts surrounding the composition of the song or from Brian Wilson’s general songwriting habits. In these cases, the interpretation is largely exegetical, drawing out items that can be overlooked, dismissed, or (mistakenly) believed to be self-explanatory. Other effects are enigmatic and admit multiple interpretations; these are tried out in connection with the more definite elements of the song structure, and the results analyzed for their contributions to understanding and appreciation. In both cases, the work is to listen to all the sonic elements of the song with the same attention that can be given to notes, chords, rhythms, forms, and so forth, which comprise the usual network of musical structure. Ultimately, interpretation moves between evidence provided by the artwork and piecing together this evidence into a narrative whole. The results are, of course, reducible to my own critical readings of the songs discussed in the remainder of the chapter. If these readings are interesting, then I’ve done well; if they prompt new ways of listening to these and other songs, then all the better.

Scene
The revving engine of “409” sets scene; listeners are placed somewhere definite—in this case, very near the front of a late-model Chevy Impala Super Sport with the titular superhot motor, circa 1963. But much is left unaccounted for. The color of the car, where it’s located (e.g., at a racetrack), the weather, time of day, and so on, are all unspecified. Even so, there is—or would be, if we bothered to test for it—broad intersubjective agreement about these details. Many of these rely on certain unmarked, generic defaults that, if not indicated explicitly by the effect itself, can nonetheless still be suggested, implied, or at least not disallowed. Exploring these is interesting and (I hope) rewarding work in elementary “sound studies.” So, in the case of “409,” asking more “journalist’s questions” of the scene elicits the following:

- Location: stationary at the beginning, so possibly a garage but really anywhere. In the middle of the song, the engine is heard again, but is audibly in motion, as in a drive-by at a race. So: drag strip or even a straight stretch of highway (for illegal street racing). (Note a few things now being ruled out: windy, curvy mountain road; congested city street; inclement weather; parking lot.)
- Time of day: When asked, most people I’ve put this question to imagine daylight, sunny and warm. The Beach Boys’ surf songs also
take place then, and many listeners unconsciously assume that the
car songs do as well.

• Color of car? Undetermined.

One way to appreciate the role of the imagination in interpreting
scene effects is to compare this description with the actual production
methods. It turns out that the sound effects in “409” were recorded at
night and on a residential street. The Wilsons’ neighbors feared illegal
street racing and called the police. (The boys apparently shut it down be-
fore the cops showed up, and no one got into trouble.) And for readers
interested in automotive technology, the car recorded did not actually
have a 409 motor but rather the predecessor, a 348. Analysis like this
is one of the royal roads into appreciation and interpretation of scene
effects in songs: what’s unspecified can be imagined variously and in dif-
f erent contexts, with lyrics then read from those vantage points.

In “409,” we discover that the scene effect is powerful enough to dis-
allow a setting perfectly supported by the lyrics. These, as Philip Lambert
points out, focus on possession of and admiration for an object clearly
likened to a girl (Lambert 2007, 39). Without the revving engine to sug-
gest otherwise, the car the lyrics describes might as well be parked in the
driveway for public approval if not under a protective tarp in a garage.
Though they do touch upon racing, they are without immediacy, de-
scribing past or future achievements. (The telling line is “When I take
her to the track . . .”) The question of when the scene takes place comes
up: is the racing going on right now? Or are we hearing memories, flash-
backs, or some kind of soundtrack of a sports-highlights show?

It’s instructive to compare this tension between lyrics and scene effect
with another song Brian cowrote with Roger Christian and Jan Berry,
“Drag City,” recorded by Jan and Dean (October 1963). This song also
opens with a revving-engine effect very similar to “409” but extended to
include a powerful acceleration off a starting line. (The stereo mix lo-
cates this on the listener’s left; as the car accelerates, it moves quickly to
the right channel, giving further detail to the scene.) We are thus placed,
more specifically than in “409,” as spectating a drag race some ways down
a strip at the titular location. The lyrics suggest that the scene effect is
about both vivid memory and powerful anticipation; the singer is “going
to Drag City” rather than already there. (He actually is still at or near
the garage where he had “just tuned” his car, and is about to go pick up
his girlfriend before heading out.) The vivid description of race day at a
track coupled with the scene effect of actual racing integrates the entire
story. The effect here is clearly marked as imagined and anticipatory; removing it doesn’t change the “Drag City” setting, while removing it in “409” makes that song an up-tempo version of “Cherry, Cherry Coupe,” where the verses set a tone of (stationary) bodywork description. (Even when the second verse barely slips in a reference to satisfactory racing credentials, it comes off as a shutdown to suspicions that the car might be a “No-Go Showboat.”)

Speech

Talking during a song is a marked effect, and the Beach Boys continued the tradition modeled in late-1950s songs, added their own material, used it consistently in post–Pet Sounds albums leading up to Holland (1973), and kept using it, more modestly, even after tastes about it had changed in the mid-1970s. Among the conventions of the times, using speech at seams in the song structure is especially effective, as in the transition from verse to chorus in “Custom Machine” (September 1963). The entire song has exhilaratingly high harmonic velocity thanks to the complex chord changes (Lambert 2007, 113–14). So harmonic g-forces are relieved for a spell when the lyric line introducing the chorus (“When I step on the gas she goes . . .”) is taken out of the melody and put into speech. This predication boosts the entrance accent of the chorus, a thrilling, onomatopoeic rendition of a high-revving engine, followed by more rapid, energetic chord changes.4 It’s a well-portrayed moment of anticipatory windup, congruent with excitement just before a race, when contestants are staged in the gates and waiting for a starting signal. Once the chorus is greenlighted, it takes off with a high-revving whine.

The speech effect here is delivered as part of the song lyrics—in rhythm, in conventional contours, a kind of Sprechstimme, in other words. Introductory or concluding speech has more intriguing effects. These events usually happen just once, not rotationally, and interpretive antennas usually can pick up strong semantic signals as a result. A particularly clear example is the amazingly lewd “Pom Pom Play Girl” (February 1964). The narrator, a spectator at a football game, gazes with a bit of contemptuous desire at the head cheerleader (whose given name is suppressed by the titular moniker). She is quickly attributed with top-clique stereotypes of beauty, self-absorption, and indifference to social inferiors—including, presumably, the narrator. (A comedic reading would costume him as a “nerd,” exaggerating his unattractiveness.) As Lambert points out, periodic statements of the hook are accompanied
by drum booms “worthy of a burlesque routine” (Lambert 2007, 134). That’s indeed where they end up, but they start out as scene effects of a high-school cheerleading routine as seen from the sidelines of a football game. It’s only in the outro that the leering turns lewd. There, the hook is repeated to fade, but rapidly upshifting stepwise through four iterations, starting from the key of A♭, before settling on the key of B, with “burlesque” drum booms for each iteration. This is all but tumescent in import. During the upshift, drum booms are preceded by “woo!”—styled feminine, as if a cheerleader is heard doing a routine. After settling, a horny teenager’s interior monologue emerges deep in the mix, too loud not to be noticed but too soft to shock: “Shake it! [pause] Wave those pom poms all around!” This is the brilliantly speech-effective sound of teenaged sexuality escaping 1950s-era repression.

To show range in atmosphere and mix placement, the intimate, spoken “I love you” in “Please Let Me Wonder” (January 1965) makes a good comparison. In this lushly arranged ballad, the singer waits, hopes, and fantasizes hearing these very words from his beloved. The first opportunity the beloved has to respond is at the end of the final verse-chorus pair, before the coda-outro of repeating choruses signals imminent end of song. The words are indeed spoken there—not gently gushed, but hurried and almost blurted; still intimate, and maybe even a little embarrassed. It has been a point of interest that it’s not the voice of the lead singer (Mike Love) that’s heard, but rather that of a chorus member (a closely miked Carl Wilson), since it gives rise to a number of interesting scenarios. A sweet and innocent reading has Carl voicing the subconscious of Mike’s narrator, which begs the question that Mike’s subconscious should have a different voice. (Recall that the narrator and speaker in “Pom Pom Play Girl” are the same.) Even so, there is richness to this reading, which stages a one-sided conversation from the narrator’s point of view. But there are tantalizing alternatives. One is a kind of figure/ground reversal, understanding the music as a soundtrack to a movie scene, an involved couple wordlessly enjoying each other’s company, and Carl Wilson’s character saying the only line of dialogue. Though not likely envisioned in the original poietic process, a gay or alternately gendered scenario can be part of contemporary aesthetics with this text, which allows the voice of the beloved indeed to be heard in the song.

While the punctuating speeches of “Custom Machine” recur in the course of rotation through the song structures, coda speeches, like that in “Pom Pom Play Girl” happen just once, giving them unique import. A charming effect combining these two features is in “Busy Doin’ Nothin’”
(March 1968). The song has two strophes, each in two halves, with the first half narrating aspects of Brian’s morning experiences, and the second focusing in vivid detail on some episode of the day. A relaxed and loping Latin-style groove, sweetly orchestrated with woodwinds, supports a “loungey” melody in the first half and singsong recitation in the second. In the first strophe, the vivid episode is about giving driving directions to Brian’s house (famously accurate—as long as one knew the starting place). In the second, after he sings about an old friend he’d like to see more of, Brian breaks into speech and announces, “I think I’ll make a call,” as if interrupting the recording session and threatening to act on pure impulse. As in “Custom Machine,” the speech effect prefaces, marks, and accents an important seam in the song structure. But here it happens once and seems initially “not of the lyrics.” It thus focuses attention on the second vivid episode, which details an unsuccessful telephone call, circa 1968. This episode is an extraordinary feat of sustained narrative pressure given the already intense stream-of-consciousness lyrical atmosphere. Jim Miller esteems the song as “one of Brian’s most subtle lyrical conquests” (1992, 196).

Interestingly, Brian and the Beach Boys allowed more extended speech into their albums from time to time, with Holland (1971) as the extreme case. That album’s “California Saga” intersperses song between recitations from Robinson Jeffers’s poem “Beaks of Eagles.” But this is only a foretaste of the elaborate twenty-minute, multipart “fairy tale,” “Mt. Vernon and Fairway,” which has all the accouterments of an old-style radio show: narration, music, scene, and other special effects. For various reasons, not least of which is that it likely couldn’t fit on the LP with the rest of the songs, “Mt. Vernon and Fairway” was a separate seven-inch EP, which contributes to a generic divorce between the “songs” on the LP and the “fairy tale” on the EP. In the latter, music is the special effect upon narration. Finally, given that the narrated interludes in Brian’s That Lucky Old Sun (2008) are credited to Van Dyke Parks (e.g., “Narrative: Between Pictures”), one can imagine that integrating spoken narrative with song was a tantalizing prospect for Smile.

Character

Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys have a taste for the low-comedy arts of mimicry, camp, and cartoon (see cover art for Smile). It was certainly acquired when they were juveniles, and it persisted long into adulthood. It is legible in their choice of cover versions, especially early on,
when they were still learning style and repertory. It is a taste for novelty numbers like Bobby “Boris” Pickett’s “Monster Mash” (1962), which the Beach Boys played often in concert, as preserved on their first live album in 1964. Over a doo-wop groove and backing, the lead vocal is delivered in *Sprechstimme* as a hammy impression of Boris Karloff (the star of “Frankenstein” movies from the 1930s). Mike Love, showing off his own abilities as a ham, thus practices a full-blown *character effect*—the (lead) singer taking on a role as if acting a part, portraying a marked character rather than the default persona of “honest singer/narrator.” Character effects are the sound of the singer putting on a mask, or switching to handle a different puppet.

There’s an instructive case to be made that the entire catalog of surf and car songs is generalized character effect. The Beach Boys were “acting” as surfers and hot-rod-ders in their songs, since Dennis Wilson and Mike Love seemed to have been the only band members who had a clue about surfing, and since no one knew anything special about cars (which explains the role of coauthors Gary Usher and Roger Christian, both of whom were quite knowledgeable and who provided the necessary vocabulary). Capitol Records publicity tried to reinforce this pretense. Photos of the band carrying surfboards (borrowed) or admiring hot rods (rented) all have a heavily staged affect even given the sheen of a corporate-funded photo-shoot. They look at cars somewhat quiz-zically, carry surfboards a bit awkwardly, and generally seem to be taking direction dutifully. Granting this curious artistic position, in analyzing individual songs we still want to make distinctions between generic expressions—no matter if these are “inauthentic”—and ostentatiously acting a part. The innocent yet surely imagined exhilaration acted out in “Catch a Wave” is different from the knowing donning of a Frankenstein mask in “Monster Mash.”

Also covered on the 1964 live album was “Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow.” A faithful rendition of the Rivingtons’ original (though faster), it gave Mike Love a chance to play a gravelly voiced “wild man” spouting the titular nonsense, while Brian—cast against type—was able to indulge in theatrical, out-of-tune, near howling in the outro. The band chose to record it again in *The Beach Boys Party!* of 1965 along with another novelty song, “Alley Oop,” about a comic-strip caveman, originally recorded by a group of Los Angeles session players. Love’s rendition is faithful to the affected character of the original while layering in other affectations: “Boris” from “Monster Mash” is heard at 1:45 (the line “great big monsters”); later (2:30), a mincing “sissy” shows up.
The *Party* album is a fund of character effects. Like other live albums, it is also heavily marked by speech effects—chatter, instructions to musicians, and the background hum of a well-attended studio party. Leaving aside the pretense that it was recorded live rather than over several days in a studio (and thus having the Beach Boys assume the character of “partygoers” throughout), the band’s background chatter is characterized by many role-playing moments—for example, preparing to play “Devoted to You,” Brian, sounding somewhat like his father, Murry, calls for order with mock sternness: “If you don’t know it, then *shut up and go home!*”

The general atmosphere in *Party* is the same as found in certain album filler-tracks from the early 1960s. In “Bull Session with ‘Big Daddy’” (January 1965), the genial mugging, horseplay, and dumb jokery on display at mealtime is familiar to anyone who has dealt with kids of that age. (I can hear Carl’s “Get outta here” at 1:41 as accompanying a swat to someone’s hand, preventing a playful grab at the French fries.) The only adult in the room is Earl Leaf, from the Capitol Records publicity department, who gets to pitch a few softball questions into the buzzing group of hungry kids. Two lines from the transcript are worth noting. In light of subsequent events, soon to unravel around *Smile*, it’s chilling to hear Brian confidently say, “I still haven’t made a mistake my whole career,” and have Mike respond nonchalantly, “We keep waiting for you to make a mistake, Brian” (1:00–06). Finally, a potential inside joke. At 1:32, during a loose discussion about the Beach Boys’ recently completed European tour, Brian takes the lead to announce with (mock?) solemnity: “You know who was a great help was Dick Rising, Capitol Records representative over there—one of the greatest guys I’ve ever met in my life.” The way this testimonial is staged, produced, and delivered suggests that risen dicks were another great part of that tour.

“Bull Session with ‘Big Daddy’” shows the kind of characters the Beach Boys were (when happy and being fed). “Cassius’ Love vs. ‘Sonny’ Wilson” (February 1964) shows how those characters could be scripted and exaggerated. Again, in light of subsequent events, staging a heated, emotional argument between Mike and Brian, each making fun of the other’s voice, is all but prophetic. Similar to a novelty number like Buchanan and Goodman’s “Flying Saucer” of 1956 (which interspersed “radio news” speech effects between short clips of hit tunes), the Love-versus-Wilson contest has short clips of Beach Boys’ songs—but rendered grotesquely, in parody. The most clever effect is letting “Farmer’s Daughter” get a sincere first verse before having a weak, out-of-tune
falsetto gradually break through the mix in the second. This track and “Our Favorite Recording Sessions” show a rare talent for self-mockery in the way the group treated their own songs. This is nowhere better exemplified than the “doofus” mask put on the narrator of “I Get Around” during *Party*, who sings an appropriate contrafactum (sample: “We always take my car / although it’s a heap”). This is a revealing act: on one hand, the Beach Boys don’t take themselves too seriously to perform self-parody, but on the other, it suggests that the original isn’t serious, genuine, or developed from deep feeling—in other words, that it supports the generalized character effect of the “surf and hot rod” songs. It’s not so much putting on a mask, but replacing one mask with another.

Production and Arrangement

So far, work from as early as “409” and as recent as *That Lucky Old Sun* has been sampled for certain characteristic effects. Scene, speech, and character are well marked, foregrounded, and discrete. The same can be said for certain *production effects*, recognizable because they estrange natural acoustic sound. The processing applied to the snare drum opening of “Do It Again” (June 1968) and which continues variously for the rest of the song is a clear instance. Another is the momentary vocal double-tracking, with a dose of ambience, in “Busy Doin’ Nothin’” at the line “Slowly, it came to me” (2:02), marking a welcome remembering of a telephone number. Pitch-height processing in “She’s Going Bald” (July 1967) is another. Production effects can also be recognized in the background of Beach Boys’ songs, as in the twangy reverb of the surf guitar, or the ambience that flatters the well-sung choral lines Brian heard in the Four Freshmen, the Lettermen, and the like. Finally, some aspire to the illegibility of the deep background, such as Murry Wilson’s advice to speed up playback to make the singers sound younger, an effect that shows up when the song is in a “weird” key or otherwise not tuned at A = 440. Indeed, most production effects are baked in at an early stage and lose markedness—reverb, mic distance, mix, and so forth. When Brian took over as record producer, more and more of these came to characterize Beach Boys’ recordings, and his mastery of them was acknowledged throughout the music and recording industry in the mid-1960s. Production effects—whether fore- or background—pervade the Beach Boys recording catalog.

If there’s a genius to these sounds, it’s encountered in the musical arranger, the figure who maps the trail from “demo” and piano-backed
frameworks to a fully worked-out, effects-laden recording. The arranger chooses sonic details for the musicians, selecting instruments and players, deciding on special instruments, voicing the choral parts for the band, and establishing the general atmosphere and groove of the song. When the arranger is also the producer, sonic details for both musicians and engineers can be coordinated, to great effect. One can’t help but hear Brian Wilson’s impressive growth in mastering production effects as accompanying equally impressive growth in sophisticated arranging. His imaginative use of the electro-theremin, for example, should be cited in orchestration textbooks. Beautifully reverbered harp at the beginning of “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” is also a distinct instrumental choice. So is the thrumming cello of “Good Vibrations.” And the overdubbing of his group’s already tight vocal ensemble enabled trademarked choral densities no other rock group tried to imitate.9 In Brian’s mid-1960s productions, the variety of sonic experience on offer is extraordinary.

Arranging, producing, and songwriting together comprise the compositional act in this music. Brian Wilson did, coordinated, and collaborated on all three. He got his start as a youngster, doing admirable ear-training work transcribing Four Freshmen songs on the piano, by all accounts with near obsessive interest (Leaf 1985, 18). This activity—as anyone who’s gone to a good music school can attest—makes for a fine “musical ear,” an easy familiarity with song, and an enduring interest in many kinds of sounds. Arrangers need all these as a matter of course. As he had a close-knit group of good singers nearby who already knew the style, his abilities to teach dense Four Freshmen chord changes by rote grew stronger. His own chord changes started acquiring exhilarating modulatory hookiness (think of the beginnings of “Custom Machine” and “I Get Around,” among many others). Eventually, he had a group of first-rate session instrumentalists whom he could trust to work out certain details (the same with recording engineers), and a small number of specially chosen recording studios where he felt his professional best. He had his hand in everything in those years: songwriting, arranging, producing, and rehearsing, and he was singularly inventive with it all.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Having analyzed a few specific scene, speech, and character effects, as well as brought them under the umbrella of production effects, and finally identifying arrangement as the coordinating art above all, we now turn to analytic vignettes of individual songs gathered into thematic
pairs. Each song in the pair has multiple effects, but also shares a central effect with the other—scene, arrangement, production, speech—though shown from a different aspect. The hope is that previous description and discussion of effects have prepared the way for focused analyses of them, while also widening the range of exposure to hooky, interesting, and surprising songs in the Beach Boys’ extensive catalog. Taken together, these songs (along with those mentioned so far) are a remarkable collection of pet sounds, a well-stocked menagerie of Brian Wilson’s musical imagination.

Versions: “Help Me, R(h)onda” and “Wonderful”

Two versions of “Help Me, Rhonda” are sometimes characterized by fans as “Ronda” and “Rhonda”—the version without the “h” referring to the album track on Today! (as spelled on the record label) and the version with the “h” referring to a remake released as a single (with this spelling) only a few months later. Casual listeners might distinguish between the “weird one” and the “sing-along one.” The reader can take an inventory of the notable and interesting differences between the two—and should focus particularly on the second half of the song.

“Ronda” ostentatiously plays with fade-out, the reasons for which aren’t immediately clear from the lyrics. And this is dangerous play, since “fade to finish” is the strongest signal of musical closure record production can generate. Feigning a finishing fade is a serious breach of convention. The effect begins in the chorus following the instrumental bridge (ca. 2:24), where mm. 5–6 are unexpectedly soft (subito piano, as musicians put it). The next pair of measures returns to regular pressure, but then even softer in mm. 9–10. Is the song concluding or not? Apparently not, since the chorus concludes at normal levels. But then Brian begins a fourth chorus (ca. 2:49) and applies the effect again until the song does indeed fade to close after the fourth measure, making the song well over three minutes long, a standard for length that would not be exceeded until Pet Sounds.

While I can imagine analyses that unify the lyric and production effect, they seem to need a good deal of force and detail to be convincing. And the existence of a “hit” single version that doesn’t use this effect complicates if not undermines this effort. Further, the play with fade in “Ronda” is best appreciated with headphones, which flies in the face of standard wisdom about Brian’s productions being designed for a low-fidelity, single-speaker car radio. In that noisy and distracting environ-
ment, the fade effect could prompt a listener to think something might be wrong with the sound equipment. Given all this, I prefer not to push through with hermeneutics, turning instead to uncharacteristic infelicities in the background vocal arrangement, which is lower and thicker than Brian’s usual practice. A focused hearing of the beginning of the chorus will confirm the observation. The voices are pitched low in the third octave, deployed in a “muddy” close position, and frequently sing a difficult “aww” vowel (the “o” in Ronda). It’s a strange sound the voices make there, especially in comparison to the beautifully arranged background vocals of the prechorus (“Ronda, you look so fine . . .”). The singers are also miked noticeably closer than Brian’s usual practice for background vocals, while the lead-vocal pair seems farther away. Moving toward the close of the chorus, mm. 9–16, Brian removes the background to emphasize the high point of the line: “Help me, Ronda, yeah!” delivered by single instead of a paired lead vocal. Though a powerful moment, it seems not to be arranged most effectively.

In “Rhonda,” the single version, Brian made a number of adjustments to the vocal and instrumental mix. He does not play fade games, which eliminates the need for two outro choruses (the first with feigning fade and the second with actual fade). Thirteen seconds are thereby saved. His other changes work to dampen the background low chords and bring up the lead singing—in essence, reversing the decision made in mixing the album version. Since that decision was about making the mix itself an effect, the reversal makes a pop-music hit out of what had been a catchy but weird (as well as long and chorus-heavy) album number. These changes required slight adjustments in the arrangement (e.g., to coda after the third chorus). More significant changes not only fix the heavy choral background in the chorus, but layer in new voices that have become “sing-along” lines at Beach Boys concerts ever since—in effect, ratifying Brian’s instincts for tuneful hooks. The clearest addition is toward the end of the chorus, as the chord changes work toward accenting the final word of the line: “Help me, Rhonda, yeah!” Here, a sudden falsetto flies in and lands squarely on “yeah!”—a beautifully conceived contrapuntal emphasis and the proper telos of harmonic tension, which then drains out in stop time with the final line, “get her out of my heart.”

A no less noticeable addition is in the bass—the vocally delivered “walking bass” line every four measures of the chorus: “bow bow bow bow.” Interestingly, Brian recorded another version in which a falsetto line is present throughout the chorus and partly doubles the “walking bass” line. Compared to the released version, which saves the falsetto
line for a climactic moment, the continuous version seems a bit overdone, though it proves Brian’s interest in the basic arranging idea in the single, which was to open up the “top” register to counteract the low background vocals.14

A different balance of production and arrangement effects can be observed in the two versions of “Wonderful,” written by Brian and Van Dyke Parks. One was released on *Smiley Smile* (July 1967). The other was known originally from bootlegs from the *Smile* recording sessions (August 1966–January 1967), later released on the *Good Vibrations* boxed set (1993) and *Smile Sessions* (2011). Like “R(h)onda,” casual listeners would readily distinguish between the “weird” version and (in this case) a “pretty” version. Fans distinguish between *Smiley Smile* and *Smile* versions. Those familiar with pop-music genres can distinguish between the “bridged” and “strophic” versions, which reflect significant differences in arrangement with attendant changes in production.

Example 2.1 represents the song structure using hierarchically stacked rectangles that enclose formal units. (Timings for section boundaries are shown underneath the rectangles.) The large rectangles denote verses, which have two endings. Ending A is relatively conclusive (and contains the title lyric), while ending B is progressive. The small rectangles enclose musical phrases, with those in the B verses easily heard as four measures each while the A phrases sound an asymmetrical $5 + 3$ measures. The strophic version in example 2.1a, from the *Smile sessions* of late 1966, is very much a vehicle for the five verses of Van Dyke Parks’s rich and dense lyrics. A number of features suggest that this version was unfinished both in songwriting (an abrupt ending) and in production (an uncharacteristically thin backing).15 As mentioned above, it was only known through bootlegs until released as part of a boxed set in 1993. Judging from even less finished versions released in 2011 (*Smile Sessions*), it is further along and evinces a developmental plan—starting from a bare harpsichord in the first verse, adding bass and a lightly strummed tenor ukulele in the second, and folding in background vocals in the third. (The fourth and fifth verses repeat the arrangement scheme of the second and third.) Yet the background vocals are tentative rather than polished, as if they were guide tracks for an upcoming backing vocal session. Other sessions document work on a “tag” or “insert” that was (probably?) meant for an outro, as well as restless experimentation with the keyboard instrument (using a “lute” stop on the harpsichord, for example, or using the piano), and including some drum-kit work as
well. In any case, the “best” session version, while beautiful, seems to promise an even more beautiful finished product. Yet when *Brian Wilson Presents Smile* was released in 2004, this version was lovingly reproduced (covered) rather than finished, though the ending was artfully patched with new Van Dyke Parks lyrics that linked to the next track, “Song for Children.”

The version of “Wonderful” the Beach Boys recorded for *Smiley Smile* is diagrammed in example 2.1b. It is a very different arrangement that suppresses the fourth verse in favor of a “bridge” based on the “Bicycle Rider” theme heard elsewhere in *Smile*, introduced by a short linking tag in an unrelated key. (This is the small, singleton box after verse 3A.) The tag appears again at the end, but without consequent—that is, linking to nowhere, making the song very open-ended and “purposefully” unfinished. The scare quotes around “bridge” denote that while the section is located in its usual spot (i.e., halfway through the song) and fulfills the usual functions of digression, departure, and deviation, it is musically unrelated to the strophes, being set in a different key and style, with clearly marked, conventional chord changes and lightly intoned doo-wop nonsense syllables. Both of these features, however, sit on a remarkable foundation of speech-effect “party noise.” As I have noted elsewhere, some of the party sounds subtly alight upon members of the underlying chords, giving the section a delicately wrought cohesion (Harrison 1997, 48–49).

Compared to the atmosphere of the verses—hushed, very close, even more thinly arranged than the strophic version—the “party” bridge is a riot of music and speech effects. Further, it takes the place of the fourth verse, which, while not advancing the plot of the lyrics, nonetheless nudes it suggestively. Further, the fourth verse in the strophic version
has a B ending, and removing it makes the second verse’s B something of an orphan and no longer a part of a coherent ABABA design.

The arrangement differences between the two versions are obvious, striking, radical, and need no further clarification. While the strophic version may indeed have been wanting some kind of bridge or outro, the Smiley Smile version seems to have been arranged with the “party” bridge as a starting point, its unconventional atmosphere requiring equally unconventional atmosphere for the verses. Strange production effects are heard throughout: “helium voiced” background singing in the ending of verse 1, subtle premonitions of the “party” scene during the ending of verses 2 and 3, and a soft but discordant harmonica at the end of verse 3. Whereas in “R(h)onda” a change in production concept necessitated alterations in the arrangement, in “Wonderful” the situation is reversed: a completely new arrangement concept called for reinforcing production effects.

Silence: “Drive-In” and “The Little Girl I Once Knew”

The “grand” or “general” pause (GP) is a familiar bit of arranging rhetoric. The music winds up to a climax, crescendo e ritardando to a big, dissonant chord that cuts off into silence (reverb optional but recommended). The resolution chord is lit up like a target for a big accent on the next appropriate downbeat. It is most satisfying when that mark is hit as expected—a resolution chord starting an important part of a song, typically the chorus.16 A clear example in the Beach Boys’ catalog is in “Good Vibrations”: the three-beated silence following the massive E♭-over-F-bass chord at 2:54, followed by expected high-energy discharge on the opening of the chorus and its hook. This schematic association with the GP makes experimenting with it quite tricky. For the three-beated silence alone, moving it to the center of a large bridge and repeating it three times is a signature effect in Brian Eno’s “Needle in the Camel’s Eye,” starting at 1:42.

Changing the length of the GP can be even more startling, as “Drive-In” shows. This high-energy, imaginatively arranged rocker is diagrammed in example 2.2. The large boxes show the four sections of the song, which express the common scheme of “Statement–Restatement–Departure–Conclusion” (Everett 2009, 140). The verses are themselves quartered, in four-measure units, according to the same scheme, as the diagram shows. The darker D-quarter box indicates that lyrics there are spoken, with song gratifyingly restored in the final C-quarter. Faster har-
monic rhythm, begun at the end of D, continues into C and creates a strong pull towards cadential closure in the tonic key. The coordination of effects here makes ending of the verse particularly fulfilling.

The departure function of the bridge is conveyed in conventional ways. Vocals are tacet, making it a purely instrumental section, and it is ostensibly in a different key (B♭, though barely). But the unexpected extension of the GP (1:08) is a notable deviation. The graphic shows the onset of the GP with an arrowhead, after the downbeat of m. 8. A return to the verse material is targeted for the next downbeat, but an extra measure of rest intervenes—shown as a small sliver of a box in the diagram—and disrupts the regularity of phrase length observed from the beginning of the song.

Example 2.3, in its bottom system, shows the effect embedded in more structural and musical detail and offers two “normalizations,” which attempt to locate the underlying regular structure overwritten by the extended GP. Version (a) is a conventional finish, with harmonic acceleration from the secondary dominant to the primary and then into the tonic of the restored verse music (e.g., “Fun, Fun, Fun,” among others). In “Drive-In,” this possibility is anticipated but can’t materialize once the downbeat of m. 8 sounds and the G chord hasn’t made the anticipated move to the C chord. This event prompts version (b), which assumes that a consistent harmonic rhythm is intended by staying on G and reserves a two-measure span for C—of which only one appears before the verse returns. The GP here is either too long or too short, and the last-heard chord before it is highly tensed toward a resolution that never materializes. Overall, it’s an unnerving effect. But it does provide the returning verse music with notable emphasis, and the speech effect in the D phrase is boosted by an amusing character effect: “Smokey Bear” makes an appearance to give his standard warning (“Remember, only you can prevent forest fires”; see the middle arrow in example 2.2).¹⁷

Though it would take some work to explain why the extended GP is appropriate to a song about an outdoor venue for cinema, the arrangement of other elements in the song suggest that “silence as missingness”
is a central theme. Even before the GP, the bridge is curiously empty of any solo instrumental effort, sounding like a backing track for a missing solo on a guitar, organ, or saxophone. This initially inchoate impression is remembered and noted when a lead guitar finally enters the texture—but so late that it coincides with the beginning of the outro (marked by the rightmost arrowhead in example 2.2, at ca. 1:35 in a 1:50 song). So, there is a lead guitar part, but it's missing until the end of the song.

Example 2.3 also makes clear that the same kind of downbeated accent announcing the GP in the bridge is foreshadowed in the introduction, which features supporting vocals without any activity in the second and fourth measures, making them as empty as those in the bridge. When background vocals enter again, in the C phrase of verse 1, they reprise this figure before delivering a tag. While conventional arranging practice, “unmuting” the background vocals in the second verse is
especially effective in “Drive-In.” Activity in the second measure of the figure is also particularly welcome and underscores that it had been missing in the previous verse. However, there is no corresponding activity in the fourth measure, a rhetorical deflation that makes the following two measures of speech especially effective.

If the GP in “Drive-In” is startling, it is truly disorienting in “The Little Girl I Once Knew” (October 1965). A common myth is that the song failed to “hit” on the charts because DJs thought the GP would make listeners wonder whether the station went off the air and switch stations (the morbid fear of “dead air”). Hence, they didn’t put it into frequent broadcast rotation. What makes a hit is as mysterious as what doesn’t, but the GP is indeed unusually built here, and it’s easy to see how it could attract concern and criticism. Example 2.4 represents the (complex!) structure in now familiar nested boxes. The largest boxes enclose the two main verse/chorus rotations. These have three parts, a form that was increasingly popular by 1965. The middle section is normally reserved for a prechorus—a passage contrived to somehow magnetize the chorus hook and thereby increase the impact of its arrival. (See Summach 2011.) Brian’s composition here reverses the conventional polarity, for the middle part of “The Little Girl I Once Knew” drains energy out of the rotations, letting them spin down completely into a GP. It’s not so much dead air that is at issue here, but a palpable sense of air actually dying during the prechorus spot—in exactly the place where it normally would be pressurizing toward release.

In the first rotation, the middle section is labeled “FX” (effects) in example 2.4. It has two phrases: (1) a speech effect (“Look out, babe”) over a rapidly thinning instrumental background, highlighted by the dark rectangle; and (2) an extended GP, with only a dying, soft vibraphone F♯ to cue that it is not a moment of dead air. It’s rather a moment of great expectancy and uncertainty. Because the chorus enters on the downbeat, the GP here is longer by one beat than the corresponding effect in “Drive-In,” which was broken by pickup notes for the chorus, three eighth notes before the downbeat. The one extra beat makes the effect seem longer than it is. The chorus entrance is powerful on B major, and at full volume to boot. Its second half feels like a new beginning in a different key, D, but subsides back toward the key level of the verse. (See example 2.4 for relevant labels.) The second rotation is like the first—except that the speech module is one measure longer, spinning down more slowly and somehow more portentously. It is as if Brian has
doubled down on his idea for an “anti-prechorus.” (This difference is marked “FXX” in example 2.4.)

Example 2.5 explains the harmonic situation. Whereas the GP in “Drive-In” left the progression very much in the air, tensed toward resolution, filling the moment with anticipation, the one here emerges from a low-energy and dissipating state. The chord-root motion from verse to chorus is analyzed into three layers. The F♯ layer fits comfortably into the first part of the verse as a repeated ii–V motion. The transposition of this motion in the second part, while possible to work into F♯, brings with it an option to modulate and open a second layer in C♯. At the beginning of FX, chords themselves stop, but their roots continue as shown. Without upper structures, the roots cannot denote (energized) seventh chords, defaulting to triads instead. In the F♯ layer, the opening chord of FX is nominally a dominant and thus potentially energized toward resolution. Without a seventh, however, it’s the motion in the C♯ layer, ii7–V7–I, that describes the situation better. Yet motion continues onward into the downbeated F♯ of the second measure, announcing the GP with another potentially conclusive motion in this key (all the more sure in the second rotation, thanks to the longer spin down). Thus, FX is all resolution and no buildup. After the chorus begins, a weak V–I connection through the GP can be recognized in retrospect, but this relationship is more inferred subsequently than experienced live.

Unlike “Drive-In,” the GP in “The Little Girl I Once Knew” is part of the verse structure and thus rotates through more than once during the course of the song. Yet as example 2.4 shows, the verse/chorus blocks take up only the first half of the song, and the GP thus happens but twice. The second half of the song has a bridge and concluding choruses. The choruses are adjusted, however, so that they don’t fully agree with those in the first half. “Chorus X,” after the Bridge, starts with a B-style chorus but in the key of D; no modulation occurs in the second half as a result. In the outro, D-style chorus modules disappear, leaving only B to cycle into the fade-out. This structural division of the song into
halves is underscored by a recall of introduction music at the beginning of the bridge, and by an actual reprise of the second module of the Intro after Chorus X. Just as the D module seemed to mark a new beginning in the Chorus, so the double re-use of introductory music signals new beginnings in the entire song structure.

“The Little Girl I Once Knew” is the last single Brian composed before turning all his attention to Pet Sounds. It is also the last plausibly written in an adolescent voice; Tony Asher and Van Dyke Parks wrote lyrics for young adults, not high-school kids. For these reasons it’s a fitting cap to the Beach Boys’ first rush of success as Capitol Records artists—a beautifully written, arranged, and produced love song of considerable musical and formal complexity. It is an ambitious work, reaching for effect. That it perhaps overreached, in the estimation of the record-buying public, is a portent of near-future troubles Brian would have reconciling commercial need for product and “live air” with his artistic interests and development as a composer.

Final Scene: “Do It Again” and “Caroline, No”

Scene effects at the beginning of a song set the stage for subsequent action; such effects at the end, while reflecting on completed action, seem also to show a result, final outcome, or next stage. They don’t, in other words, seem to reveal a previously hidden scene as much as bring the lights up on the next one. As we discovered at the beginning of this chapter, a revving engine at the beginning of “409” sets up a song about a car, whereas one at the end would serve a reading that the car is ready for racing now that the song about it is over.

“Do It Again” (May 1968) begins with a production effect of the estranging kind: “running a series of press rolls on a snare drum through a tape-delay system” (White 1994, 282–83). It’s an arresting “call to at-
tention” gesture that introduces a simple verse-chorus number with contrasting bridge, artfully constructed to increase intensity subtly yet consistently throughout the song, which then concludes with a scene effect taken from the *Smile* sessions of eighteen months earlier: the sounds of hammering by a crew of carpenters. On bootlegs, it was called “workshop” or “woodshop,” and Brian did incorporate it into his 2004 *Smile* version, but its first release was as the very fitting concluding scene effect of “Do It Again.”

By simple verse-chorus, I mean that the chorus has the same chord progression as the verse: four measures of I followed by one measure each of IV and V and concluding with two measures of I—among the most unambiguous affirmations of tonal center as can be composed. In this, it is markedly different from Brian’s signature harmonic style, with its unexpected chord changes and thrilling turns of musical phrase. (It is not hard to read this as pointing to Brian’s earliest up-tempo hits, modeled on equally simple blues structures. This is among the things he is doing again in this song.) It is common arranging practice with simple verse-chorus songs to add musical elements at each large-scale repetition—background vocals, instruments, and so on—in an effort to maintain listener interest. It is an unavoidably teleological scheme; since each repetition is stronger than the previous, the last is thus the strongest. Here’s how Brian manages the scene:

- Verse 1 continues the processed drum groove under Mike Love’s lead vocal, which is delivered in a notably nasal way reminiscent of his singing five years previously; it easily brings to mind Brian’s parody of it in “Cassius’ Love vs. ‘Sonny’ Wilson.” After the opening four-measure $E\flat$ (= I) harmony, the $A\flat$ (= IV) chord enters, but the bass remains on $E\flat$, providing the most immobile and static support possible.

- At the beginning of verse 2 (0:24), middle-distance, on-beat handclaps are added to the percussion groove. After two measures, sustained, mellow, background chords rise gently in the mix (ca. 0:30). After two more measures, the bass does indeed move to $A\flat$ to support the IV chord, feeding subtle supporting energy into the verse. When the final $E\flat$ tonic chord is reached, the background chords have raised a short ascending line from stable tonic (doh) to the active third scale degree (mi). At the end, another subtle touch. Just before the chorus begins (0:40), a bent, bluesy guitar note sounds as an announcement—the first instrumental sound that hasn’t been pure chordal structure.
• The chorus (starting at 0:41) is a significant jump in musical density. Trademarked Beach Boy vocal sound explodes into the mix—tightly tuned from bass all the way up to falsetto, but easy with the groove, contrapuntal without affecting learnedness, and—all the more by being a wordless doo-wop—performed with assured comfort and evident fun. High-end spectrum is also activated with the addition of a tambourine to the percussion mix.

• The bridge (0:57) departs from the groove completely, setting up an effective contrasting section and thus resetting the bar for the subsequent verse-chorus rotation. Lambert aptly describes the first two phrases (8 mm.) as “a kind of moonlit dream sequence” (Lambert 2007, 301). Once the harmony locks on B♭ (= V), the original groove returns (processed snare drum) for one measure, followed by another four that build the groove all the way back up, topping the chord off with an urgent seventh.

• The bridge discharges into an untexted verse (1:16), featuring a bluesy electric guitar solo supported by layers of doo-wop background vocals different from those found in the chorus.

• The resetting effect of the bridge and untexted verse allows Brian to make another run at a powerful chorus entrance. The beginning of verse 3 (1:40) not only resumes lyrics, but adds an unprocessed, “natural” drum kit at the front of the mix, effectively effacing the processed drum sound of the opening. As in verse 2, adjustments to the mellow background chords are made after two measures (ca. 1:43), but here they are dialed back down, as if setting the composition into a crouch before springing into the final chorus. Also as in verse 2, the “bent bluesy note” returns, but here sung by the background vocals as a chord. The supremely heartfelt, easygoing, and perfectly tuned delivery makes this a great moment in the Beach Boys recorded catalog, where one can appreciate the value of having turned down the mellow background in order to make the “bent bluesy chord” pop out of the texture.

• The second, and final, chorus (1:56) is even denser than the first. The foregrounded drum kit continues, and the “different” layer of background doo-wop vocals from the bridge is mixed in with the previous chorus vocals—softly at first, but by halfway through (2:04), they emerge clearly before joining in the general fade-out; last to appear and last to go.

• By the time that fade-out is apparent, the attractions of the arrangement and production have been amply displayed: to lyrics that are an open call to “return to roots,” a very simple verse-chorus form
supports Mike’s old-school delivery. The estrangement of the opening production effect on the drum kit, coupled with the static bass line and (retrospectively) spare backing gives way, ultimately, to a virtuosic display of Beach Boys’ layering backing vocals supported by a “real” drum kit and prefaced by a seemingly tossed-off yet perfectly executed bluesy chord. The composition is the perfect soundtrack for a “Yeah, we’re back, and as good as ever” scene.

The end of “Do It Again” is a call to fundamental renewal. The fundamentals are communicated with directness. The lyrics reference all the themes of past hits: beach, surfing, girls, warmth, California, and so forth. But then the chorus shows what is truly loved: the wordless beauty of harmony singing by relatives and close friends—a powerful enactment of the Biedermeier vision of domestic uplift through music. While the joyful doo-wop syllables that take the place of lyrics are not sounds of the early nineteenth century, they are nonetheless sounds of a comfortable contemporary family.

As “Do It Again” fades out, a scene effect fades in that focuses the emotional outcome of the song. Many hammers (= many hands, many actors) are heard working on various pieces (wood, metal). A busy construction site is suggested, but the variety of materials being worked suggests a small manufactory or woodshop, where craftsmen work on individual pieces of a larger object. (The miking of the scene also suggests close quarters of the shop rather than the larger expanse of construction site.) One subtle but telling character effect is heard amid the shop noise: just before fade-out, someone “on the scene” exclaims “Ow!,” presumably because of a misplaced hammer blow. There is a genial, good-naturedness to this shout that paints the workshop in the kindly colors of artisanal, social, and voluntary effort—something like a barn-raising or workday at the community center—this, rather than the site of some Fordist regime of mass production, where a smashed finger would likely elicit more profane oaths, colorfully extended. Given the general bonhomie and domesticity of the lyrics, the purposeful buzz of construction activity makes even clearer what the wordless chorus suggest, that getting back to fundamentals means rebuilding the Beach Boys from their starting point in love for making music together, especially vocal harmony. It’s good-natured fun, portable to a variety of music-making settings and themes, and immensely rewarding, as anyone who has sung in harmony can attest. “Build the Beach Boys Again” is one way to concretize the “it” of the song’s title as the workshop scene concludes.
“Do It Again” is the first song on the *20/20* album, and it thus seems to promise subsequent songs that show off the new construction. This promise itself is founded on the scene-setting powers of the workshop effect, themselves fueled by extremely explicit and lyrical joy in making something (= music) together. “Caroline, No,” in contrast, is the last song on *Pet Sounds*; its concluding scene effect trails off and leaves listeners alone with their thoughts.

*Pet Sounds* is a beautiful collection of songs, fully deserving the *Liederkreis* honor bestowed on the album from its release in 1966. Among the many levels at which the album coheres, the way it uses purely instrumental tracks to preface the last song on each side is pertinent here. These give those final tracks particular emphasis. On the A-side, the instrumental track is the breezy “Let’s Go Away for Awhile”; the final track on that side, in contrast, famously describes “the worst trip I’ve ever been on,” styled with top-notch Brian Wilson choral writing on a happy Caribbean theme. “Sloop John B.” is, in the context of the album, an unexpected “downer” ending—composed though it is with hopeful joy and happy affect. This interpretation is fully underwritten by the preceding, travel-themed song.

The A-side begins happy, with the groovy “Wouldn’t It Be Nice,” but it ends strangely with perhaps the best happy-affect song about a series of bad travel experiences composed to date. Side B begins with the evergreen “God Only Knows,” a widely admired gem of twentieth-century American songwriting. The prefacing instrumental track near the end of that side is titled “Pet Sounds,” but may be better recalled as a spec piece for a James Bond movie soundtrack. The low, lazy, twangy lead guitar brings to mind the bright days of rock instrumental groups like the Ventures and, of course, the surf guitarists that the Beach Boys heard around Southern California. A powerful, slow groove supports a bluesy lead guitar line that’s in no hurry. It’s a piece that could proceed directly from the guitar riff that opens all (official) James Bond movies. It may also be the thickest wall of background sound that Brian ever produced, richly orchestrated and reveling in reverb. If this track started as a musical introduction to Sean Connery’s James Bond—confident, classy, suave, sexy, cool, and so forth—it is rendered brilliantly.

“Caroline, No” follows, an exquisite song of aching nostalgia, sung by Brian alone, and introduced by a memorable arranging effect: a haunting series of drum strokes on a upside-down and empty water jug, followed by an oscillating harpsichord background supporting his lead vocal. (This is the same harpsichord idea as in strophic “Wonderful.”) The
self-assuredness of Bond is completely undercut by this lonesome wail of a song. Somehow, the “Pet Sounds” instrumental track turned into an even worse “trip” than the one on the previous side, and the downer result is here magnified rather than dissipated by the musical arrangement.

And further: after the song fades (and not cross-faded as in “Do It Again”), a scene effect is heard, full of signifiers that all but paint an Edward Hopper scene of loneliness, isolation, and alienation—Nighthawks in sound. Characteristically for the Beach Boys, a bit of love, affection, loyalty, and companionship is also mixed in. Example 2.6 zooms in on the effect, using a bow instead of rectangles to note symbolically its gradual emergence and disappearance. It’s useful to note that the initial fade-in is not dialed up from the control booth, but by the dynamics of the scene itself, which includes powerfully suggestive Doppler effect. The timepoints and associated arrowheads are an initial inventory of events in the scene:

- 0:00 in the diagram begins at 2:17 in the song; the scene effect begins with crossing bells and train horn.
- At 3.6 seconds, a pair of medium-sized dogs begin to bark.
- At 10.5 seconds, the train horn sounds a second time, louder than before; dogs stop barking.
- At 13 seconds, the train horn sounds a third time (short).
- From 16.8 through 19.2, the train horns sounds the last time, and the locomotive passes.
- At 22.0, train cars are passing by.
- Between 22 and 26, the dogs begin barking again.
- At 26, the last car passes by, and the dogs continue barking into fade-out.

This inventory of the scene has a train approaching a crossing, and some nearby dogs. A second inventory accounts for more detail. Clanging bells, of the type still used at railroad crossings, raise the curtain on one set (at least) of long, straight railroad tracks interrupted by a road, possibly unpaved. We surmise this because the high speed of the approaching train (judged by Doppler effect at 19.2, ca. 80 mph) precludes tight curves and complex track junctions (i.e., trainyard). It is also a setting far beyond the most recent station stop, with far yet to go to the next. It cannot be an urban setting, but a rural one. Dogs suggest nearby inhabitation—a station house, perhaps a small village, maybe a
solitary farmstead. The train is pulled by a modern (for 1965) diesel-electric locomotive, not an old-fashioned steam engine. (The air horn instead of a steam whistle is the clue.) This is an interesting distinction, as it refuses to project the profound nostalgia of the lyrics (for an earlier, younger lover) onto an emerging public symbol of nostalgia (i.e., for the great age of American industrial output). In truth, the diesel horn is actually the sound of American railroading at the beginning of an age of spectacular decline. It’s the sound of a present less optimistic than the past. There’s no little irony that this effect was put on record by a group noted for their songs about cars.

The train horn sounds the proper warning signal as it approaches the crossing: two longs, a short, and a long. The last coincides with the locomotive reaching and passing the crossing, when the Doppler effect shifts the horn’s B♭7 trichord to G7. After the locomotive and horn recede and their sounds diminish, passenger cars are heard passing by—no more than a dozen, judging from the time intervals between “clacks” of the wheels on a nearby rail joint (intervals that are too wide for freight cars, given the speed). All train sound-clues suggest an intercity passenger train, possibly with sleeping and lounge cars.18

I’m pretty sure I’ve described accurately the recorded setting of the scene effect—that is, a recording technician set up equipment at a railroad crossing that had high-speed passenger service and captured the sonic scene. Unlike the workshop in “Do It Again,” which was created in studio for a specific project (though, as we’ve seen, repurposed successfully for another), the train scene in “Caroline, No” likely was part of a library of sounds available to broadcast and recording studios. Thus, Brian would have had his choice among various railroad effects (e.g., “steam engine starting,” “slow freight,” etc.) once he had narrowed his interests there. The choice of speeding passenger train was intentional.

His dogs, Banana and Louie, were recorded later and mixed into the train scene. Their bark gives away their medium-small size, if nothing else. The barks themselves are of the “aroused and actively noticing” kind rather than those prefacing a dogfight or facing down a threat. It’s
fully reasonable to expect that the dogs have been aroused by the train. Agreeing to this subtly shifts ownership of the animals. If the dogs were a stationmaster’s, say, or working dogs on the farm, such barking would not long be tolerated by their master. (We know the train line is active with both passenger and freight because of the expense of maintaining crossing signals and 80 mph speeds.) The dogs might now belong to a transient observer of the scene, waiting at the crossing for the train to pass before proceeding. At this point, we can easily finish a painting of a single pickup truck at a dusty railroad crossing, two dogs roaming around back in the truck bed, as a speeding locomotive is whisking away people with a destination and purpose, people on a journey that’s on track and proceeding apace, people maybe even enjoying the conviviality of a lounge car. And the pickup driver’s circumstances? The same as ours after the intense loneliness of the song: down, emotionally spent, stunned stationary while anonymous others speed by unheeding. The two dogs, our only comfort.

Two final scene details might be teased out. While long straights of rural rail can be found all over the country, the original train recording—as well as Brian’s own imaginary setting for it—was likely in arid Southern California, in a valley or even desert. The landscape is open, big, and not heavily forested. This bigger, “empty” stage intensifies the puniness of the “pickup truck driver’s” observing perspective—a small isolate amid a vast expanse. Finally, all the preceding makes perfectly plausible and likely a setting of this scene in the deep night, perhaps moonless, though nothing prevents lighting the scene with blazing sun at midday. But the bleakness of the song suggests a blackness for the scene.

Before closing the book on pet sound effects, we should note how much they are creatures of the recording. Scene effects in particular can be removed without challenging the unity of a song, and indeed live versions usually omit them altogether—which is to say that the Beach Boys don’t start with a revving engine when they perform “409” in concert. Speech and character effects transfer, but not all production and arranging effects. In this light, one can appreciate how getting rid of “Ronda’s” feigning fade made “Rhonda” better for live performance. To my knowledge, “Drive-In” and “The Little Girl I Once Knew” have rarely if ever been on the live set list, but concert audiences abhor silence even more than radio DJs, and so these songs remain best on record. The “finished bootleg” that is strophic “Wonderful” has been performed live, while the bridged version (again, to my knowledge) has never been attempted;
the problems in re-creating the “party scene” for the bridge are perhaps not worth the effort. As for “Do It Again,” the subtle arrangement detailed some pages ago cannot be conveyed well in live performance. Their most recent concert arrangement (for the fiftieth anniversary tour) mostly dispenses with background manipulation, leaves the bent bluesy note to the discretion of the lead guitarist (David Marks), and doesn’t bother with bringing in the unprocessed snare for the final verse. Instead of the easy and nearly effortless buildup of the recording, the live arrangement, in its treatment of the bluesy chord, overinflates what had originally been the most effective sung moment on the track. Stop time arrests the instrumentals, opening a bit of silence to introduce the chord, delivered forcefully and with conceivably even more bend than the original. No longer a gesture of easy mastery, it is a demonstration of raw power. All this goes to show that effects are products of the arranger’s imagination. Any that are indispensable to a song are kept (or the song isn’t given any subsequent arrangement without them), and those that are ornamental, as it were, don’t need to be transferred to other arrangements. Nevertheless, this chapter has argued that they are valuable artifacts for interpreting the songs, that they document an extremely inventive and imaginative arranger who knew his musicians as family, relatives, and friends, and who wrote for the admirable effects he knew he could achieve with them.

Finally, an envoi and a performance-practice recommendation. One of the earliest ingredients the arranger/producer mixes into the final confection is mono/stereo. Stereo background effects are extraordinary compared to mono, which can be appreciated perfectly with headphones plugged into a receiver with a mono-out switch. Toggling between the two modes is an ear-opening exercise. Stereo spreads sound horizontally between the ears, while mono concentrates it vertically, as if in a column bisecting that same between-the-ear space. Stereo-specific foreground effects can be extraordinary as well, including all those that descend from the bouncing ping-pong ball demonstrations used to sell early models of home stereophonic equipment. But Brian had only one good ear (the other disabled in childhood; circumstances unclear) and so couldn’t hear in stereo. He continued to mix down in mono. One might worry that Brian would be “lapped” by stereo-abled young producer/arrangers who had gone to school on his records, and who aspired to an audience with expensive stereos who listened to LPs on headphones. (Pink Floyd would make a strong play for this group.) As noted previously, Brian’s mono style was perfectly suited for the single speaker of the car radio
picking up a local Top 40 AM station. It is an underappreciated statement of demotic appeal.

There’s another venue besides the car where mono sounds better than stereo. Parties, rock concerts, clubs (really, all versions of the same thing) are crowds of people buzzing, mingling, moving, laughing, dancing. They aren’t an ideal formation for stereo effects, which is to say standing in single file, a bisector to the line between the stereo speaker-array, or wearing headphones. So those who end up in front of one side of a stereo output will hear a distorted mix, as will those on the opposite. In these venues and conditions, it’s better to use mono and pump equal sound mix from both sides. It is true that stereo remixes of Beach Boys records have been issued in order to keep them consonant with modern production norms. They are tastefully done and show off Brian’s original arrangements beautifully. They sound great on headphones. But if you find yourself putting on some Beach Boys tunes for a group, whether for friends, colleagues, students, please use the mono version. (Even the later, all-stereo tracks benefit from mono output!) In other words, the Beach Boys are generally best heard while in a crowd, or at least a group, and maybe best at a party. They make music you want to sing along to, and in parts, too. And it’s music, thanks to its remarkable deployment of effects, that stays fresh and compelling.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

1. Starting the song with the distinctive sound of a powerful car motor was not, in fact, an idea original to the Beach Boys, but an emerging norm of writing “car songs” for the Southern California pop music market, as in The Duals’ “Stick Shift” (1961). The revving engine at the beginning, screeching tires in the middle, and police siren at the end recall similar sounds from driver’s ed films or moralizing radio dramas. According to The Duals’ producer, Ron Barrett, the idea for using an engine sound came to him after he remembered Vernon Green’s imitation of car sound-effects in The Medallions’ “Buick 59” (1954), http://www.starrevue.com/TheDuals.htm. The Duals reused the engine opening for a follow-up single, “The Big Race,” which did not chart. Interestingly, this song is about a 409 (which ultimately loses after leading for most of the race). The resemblance in vocal delivery between this song and the Beach Boys’ “409” is uncannily close.

2. The URL is http://open.spotify.com/user/1210513370/playlist/5ivKqKJHzUKK0J4QqO47zf.

3. Timothy White describes both Gary Usher’s desire to upgrade his current street rod to a 409 and the setting for the effects recording in the Wilson’s neighborhood (White 1994, 153–56). Jon Stebbins, apparently drawing from memo-
ries of early Beach Boy David Marks, affirmatively states that Usher’s car was a 348, not a 409 (Stebbins 2007, 40).


5. For added effect, listeners were exhorted, via a notice on the record label, to listen in the dark.

6. In the case of Brian Wilson in particular, this identification is an important part of his latter-day image and an active site of critical interpretation. See Curnutt 2012. To be sure, the narrating persona of a song need not be closely identified with the person of the songwriter, though in some genres this is encouraged and seen as a mark of sincerity. But, in general, songs are heard as appropriate to their singers, even if written by another, and the best, most versatile singers can maintain this connection through remarkable range.

7. The highest tension in this staging of the Beach Boys’ career is the unquestioningly queasy-looking cover photo for the overinsistently titled album Summer Days (and Summer Nights!!).

8. See Harrison 1997, 41, for further transcription.

9. I think a comparison with the Association or with the Four Seasons is appropriate here. The Beach Boys choral technique was built off the beautifully led vocal lines in Four Freshmen ballads, which the boys learned by rote at an early age with close family members, surely peerless ensemble training. Moreover, Brian had an effective falsetto, which put a strong high cap on their chord voicings. This foundation, enhanced by production effects, made for an extraordinarily tight and luxurious choral sound, among the most distinctive in the recorded history of American popular music.

10. The songs are limited to those recorded between 1964 and 1968 for various reasons (not least of which is space), but mostly to showcase the vigor and youth of the band’s voices during that time.

11. Harmonists should also note the dissonant 6/4 effects the background vocals create in mm. 9–12 of the chorus.

12. Another seven seconds are shaved in the single version by dispensing with the instrumental introduction.

13. This version was officially released on the Endless Harmony compilation (1998).

14. A final word about “R(h)onda.” A bootleg of a drunk Wilson paterfamilias, Murry, disrupting a recording session for the single version has been known to fans since the 1990s. (Excerpts are transcribed in White 1994, 230–33, and Carlin 2006, 53–58.) A psychotherapist who heard the bootleg found it an extraordinary document of family dysfunction, with Murry berating the band for not “singing from their hearts,” and for having let success go to their heads. Other cutting, angry, and even vicious remarks punctuate these themes. While Murry was no longer involved in day-to-day management of the Beach Boys by this time and thus wasn’t the presence he had once been, the enduring power of formative family dynamics is on display. That Murry’s criticisms about what was going on in the session were leveled at a future number-one hit song is sadly ironic and shows how out of touch he had become with Brian’s compositional abilities.

15. Brad Elliot claims that the song was indeed finished (Priore 1995, 147).
Questions remain as to why the Beach Boys didn’t use it in *Smiley Smile* or patch it up for later release, as they did with “Surf’s Up,” “Our Prayer,” and “Cabinessence.”

16. Everett discusses a similar effect as “stop time,” though many of his examples have some kind of fill—drum, vocal, or solo instrumental—and are thus more like cadenzas than grand pauses (Everett 2009, 311–13).

17. This public-service announcement was widely broadcast in fire-prone Western states, and was also likely shown in movie previews.

18. Already in evident decline in 1965, such trains threatened to disappear completely by 1968, and in 1971, Amtrak was formed to run a vastly reduced system.