The Beach Boys are an American rock band, formed in 1961 in Hawthorne, California. The group was initially composed of brothers Brian, Dennis and Carl Wilson, their cousin Mike Love, and friend Al Jardine. Managed by the Wilsons' father Murry, The Beach Boys signed to Capitol Records in 1962. The band's early music gained popularity across the United States for its close vocal harmonies and lyrics reflecting a Southern California youth culture of surfing, cars, and romance. By the mid-1960s, leader Brian Wilson's growing creative ambition and songwriting ability would dominate the group's musical direction. The primarily Brian-composed Pet Sounds album and "Good Vibrations" single (both released in 1966) featured a complex, intricate and multi-layered sound that was a far cry from the simple surf rock of The Beach Boys' early years. However, Brian would soon lose control of the band because of mental-health and substance-abuse issues, this led to the cancellation of the anticipated follow up to Pet Sounds, Smile. Subsequently, although they released a number of highly artistic albums (in various musical styles, with different line-ups) in ensuing years, particularly in the years 1967-1973, the group never managed to reclaim its mid-1960s peak when The Beach Boys briefly challenged The Beatles both in terms of commercial and critical appeal. Since the 1980s, there has been much legal-wrangling among the group members over royalties, songwriting credits, and use of the band's name. While The Beach Boys released their last studio album in 1996, a number of versions of the band, each fronted by a surviving member of the original quintet (Dennis and Carl Wilson died in 1983 and 1998, respectively), continue to tour.

The Beach Boys have often been called "America's Band",[1] and Allmusic has stated that "the band's unerring ability... made them America's first, best rock band."[2] The group has had 36 United States Top 40 hits (the most by an American rock band) and 56 Hot 100 hits, including four number-one singles.[2] Rolling Stone magazine listed The Beach Boys at number 12 on their 2004 list of the "100 Greatest Artists of All Time," the highest ranking for an American Rock & Roll band.[3] The group is also one of America's highest-selling acts, having sold over 100 million albums worldwide since their debut in 1961. Though no official figure exists, it is estimated at present to be between 110 million and 120 million. This makes them one of the best-selling groups in America, rivaled only by The Four Seasons. Brian Wilson, Carl Wilson, Mike Love and Al Jardine were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988.

At age 16, Brian Wilson shared a bedroom with his brothers, Dennis and Carl, in their family home in Hawthorne. He watched his father, Murry Wilson, play piano and listened intently to the harmonies of vocal groups like The Four Freshmen. One night he taught his brothers a song called "Ivory Tower" and how to sing the background harmonies. "We practiced night after night, singing softly, hoping we wouldn't wake our Dad."[4] For his 16th birthday, Brian was given a reel-to-reel tape recorder. He learned how to overdub, using his vocals and those of Carl and their mother. He would play piano and later added Carl playing the Rickenbacker guitar he got as a Christmas present.[5]
Soon Brian was avidly listening to Johnny Otis on his KFOX radio show, a favorite station of Carl's. Inspired by the simple structure and vocals of the rhythm and blues songs he heard, he changed his piano-playing style and started writing songs. His enthusiasm interfered with his music studies at school. He failed to complete a twelfth-grade piano sonata, but did submit an original composition, called "Surfin".[6]

Family gatherings brought the Wilsons in contact with cousin Mike Love. Brian taught Love's sister Maureen and a friend harmonies. Later, Brian, Mike Love and two friends performed at Hawthorne High School, drawing tremendous applause for their version of doo-wop group The Olympics' "Hully Gully".[7] Brian also knew Al Jardine, a high school classmate, who had already played guitar in a folk group called The Islanders. One day, on the spur of the moment, they asked a couple of football players in the school training room to learn harmony parts, but it wasn't a success—the bass singer was flat.[8]

Brian suggested to Jardine that they team up with his cousin and brother Carl. It was at these sessions, held in Brian's bedroom, that "the Beach Boys sound" began to form. Brian says: "Everyone contributed something. Carl kept us hip to the latest tunes, Al taught us his repertoire of folk songs, and Dennis, though he didn't [then] play anything, added a combustible spark just by his presence." Love encouraged Brian to write songs and gave the fledgling band its name: The Pendletones, derived from the Pendleton woolen shirts popular at the time. In their earliest performances, the band wore the heavy wool jacket-like shirts, which were favored by surfers in the South Bay. Although surfing motifs were very prominent in their early songs, Dennis was the only band-member who surfed.[9] He suggested that his brothers compose some songs celebrating his hobby and the lifestyle which had developed around it in Southern California.[10]

Jardine and a singer friend, Gary Winfrey, went to Brian's to see if he could help out with a version of a folk song they wanted to record—"Sloop John B". In Brian's absence, the two spoke with Murry, a music industry veteran of modest success. In September 1961, Murry arranged for The Pendletones to meet publishers Hite and Dorinda Morgan at Stereo Masters in Hollywood.[11] The group performed a slower ballad, "Their Hearts Were Full of Spring", but failed to impress the Morgans. After an awkward pause, Dennis mentioned they had an original song, "Surfin". Brian was taken aback—he had not finished writing the song—but Hite Morgan was interested and asked them to call back when the song was complete.[10]

With help from Love, Brian finished the song and the group rented guitars, drums, amplifiers and microphones. They practiced for three days while the Wilsons' parents were on a short
vacation. When they auditioned again a few days later, Hite Morgan declared: "That's a smash!"[12] In October, The Pendletones recorded twelve takes of "Surfin'" in the Morgans' cramped offices. A small number of singles were pressed. When the boys eagerly unpacked the first box of singles, on the Candix Records label, they were shocked to see their band name changed to "Beach Boys". Murry Wilson, now intimately involved with the band's fortunes, called the Morgans. Apparently a young promotion worker, Russ Regan, made the change to more obviously tie the group in with other surf bands of the time. The limited budget meant the labels could not be reprinted.

Released November 1961, "Surfin'" was soon aired on KFWB and KDAY, two of Los Angeles' most influential radio stations. It was a hit on the West Coast, and peaked at number 75 on the national pop charts. Murry Wilson told the boys he did not like "Surfin'". However, according to Brian, "he smelled money to be made and jumped on the promotional bandwagon, calling every radio station..."[14] By now the de-facto manager of The Beach Boys, Murry got the group's first paying gig on New Year's Eve, 1961, at the Ritchie Valens Memorial Dance in Long Beach, headlined by Ike & Tina Turner. Brian recalls how he wondered what they were doing there; "five clean-cut, unworldly white boys from a conservative white suburb, in an auditorium full of black kids". Brian describes the night as an "education"—he knew afterwards that success was all about "R&B, rock and roll, and money". The boys went home with $50 apiece.[15]

In February 1962, Jardine left the band to continue his college studies.[15] David Marks, a thirteen-year-old neighbour and friend of Carl and Dennis who had been playing electric guitar for years with Carl, replaced him. (Jardine, at Brian's request, rejoined the band in July 1963).[16] In 1962, The Beach Boys began wearing blue/gray-striped button-down shirts tucked into white pants as their touring "uniforms", the band's signature look through to 1966.

Though Murry effectively seized managerial control of the band without consultation, Brian acknowledges that he "deserves credit for getting us off the ground... he hounded us mercilessly... [but] also worked hard himself". He was the first to stress the importance of having a follow-up hit.[18] The band duly recorded four more originals, on June 13 at Western Studios, Los Angeles, including "Surfer Girl", "409" and "Surfin' Safari". The session ended on a bitter note, however: Murry Wilson unsuccesssfully suggested and then demanded that The Beach Boys record some of his own songs, saying "My songs are better than yours."[19]

On July 16, on the strength of the June demo session, The Beach Boys were signed to Capitol Records. By November, their first album was ready—Surfin' Safari.[20] Their song output continued along the same commercial line, focusing on California youth lifestyle.[9] The early Beach Boys' hits helped raise both the profile of the state of California and of surfing. The group
The Beach Boys also celebrated the Golden State's obsession with hot-rod racing ("Shut Down", "409" and "Little Deuce Coupe") and the pursuit of happiness by carefree teens ("Be True to Your School", "Fun, Fun, Fun" and "I Get Around").[21]

Apart from Murry Wilson and the close vocal harmonies of Brian's favorite groups, early inspiration came from the driving rock-and-roll sound of Chuck Berry and Phil Spector's Wall of Sound production.[22][23] Musically, their early songs are often based on those of others; for instance, "Surfer Girl" shares its rhythmic melody with "When You Wish Upon a Star", while "Surfin' USA" is a slight variation of Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen".[24] A lawsuit officially granted Berry writing credit and royalties from the record.[25] The Beach Boys' early hits made them major pop stars in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries, with sixteen hit singles in 1962–1965. However, with the British Invasion in 1964, some British groups, in particular The Beatles, eclipsed their success.

By 1964, the stress of road travel, composing, producing and maintaining a high level of creativity became too much to bear for Brian Wilson. In December that year, while on a flight to Houston, Brian suffered from an anxiety attack and left the tour. Shortly afterward, he announced his withdrawal from touring to concentrate entirely on songwriting and record production. This wasn't the first time Brian had stopped touring. In 1963, when Jardine returned, Brian left the road; but when Marks quit, Brian had to return in his place. For the rest of 1964 and into 1965, Glen Campbell served as Wilson's replacement in concert, until his own career success required him to leave the group.[26] Bruce Johnston was asked to locate a replacement for Campbell; having failed to find one, Johnston himself subsequently became a full-time member of the band, first replacing Wilson on the road and later contributing his own talents in the studio beginning with the sessions for "California Girls".[27]

Jan and Dean, close friends with the band and their opening act 1963 and 1964, encouraged Brian to use session musicians in the studio. This, along with Brian's withdrawal from touring, permitted him to expand his role as a producer. Wilson also wrote "Surf City" for the Jan & Dean opening act. Their recording hit number one on the US charts in the summer of 1963, a development that pleased Brian but angered Murry, who felt his son had "given away" what should have been the Beach Boys' first chart-topper. A year later, The Beach Boys would notch their first number-one single with "I Get Around."

Soon, traces of Brian Wilson's increasing studio productivity and innovation were noticeable: "Drive-In", an album track from All Summer Long (1964) features bars of silence between two verses while "Denny's Drums", the last track on Shut Down, Vol. II (1964), is a two-minute drum solo.[28] As Wilson's musical efforts became more ambitious, the group relied more on nimble
session players, on tracks such as "I Get Around" and "When I Grow Up (To Be a Man)". "Help Me, Rhonda" became the band's second number-one single in the spring of 1965.

1965 led to greater experimentation behind the soundboard with Wilson. The album Today! featured less focus on guitars, more emphasis on keyboards and percussion, as well as volume experiments and increased lyrical maturity. Side A of the album was devoted to sunnier pop tunes, with darker ballads on the reverse side. This pattern was also evident on some of the band's singles; songs such as "Kiss Me, Baby" released on the B-side to "Help Me, Rhonda" and "Let Him Run Wild" on the B-side to "California Girls", each featured Brian Wilson on lead vocals, and foreshadowed the youthful angst that would later pervade Wilson's upcoming efforts.

In November 1965, the group followed up their number-three summer smash "California Girls" with another top 20 single, "The Little Girl I Once Knew". It is considered to be the band's most experimental statement thus far, using silence as a pre-chorus, clashing keyboards, moody brass, and vocal tics. Perhaps too extreme an arrangement to go much higher than its modest number 20 peak, it was only the band's second single not to reach the top 10 since their 1962 breakthrough. In December they would score an unexpected number two hit (number three in the UK) with the single "Barbara Ann", which Capitol released as a single without input from any of The Beach Boys. A cover of a 1961 song by The Regents, it became one of The Beach Boys most recognized hits over the years. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beach_Boys