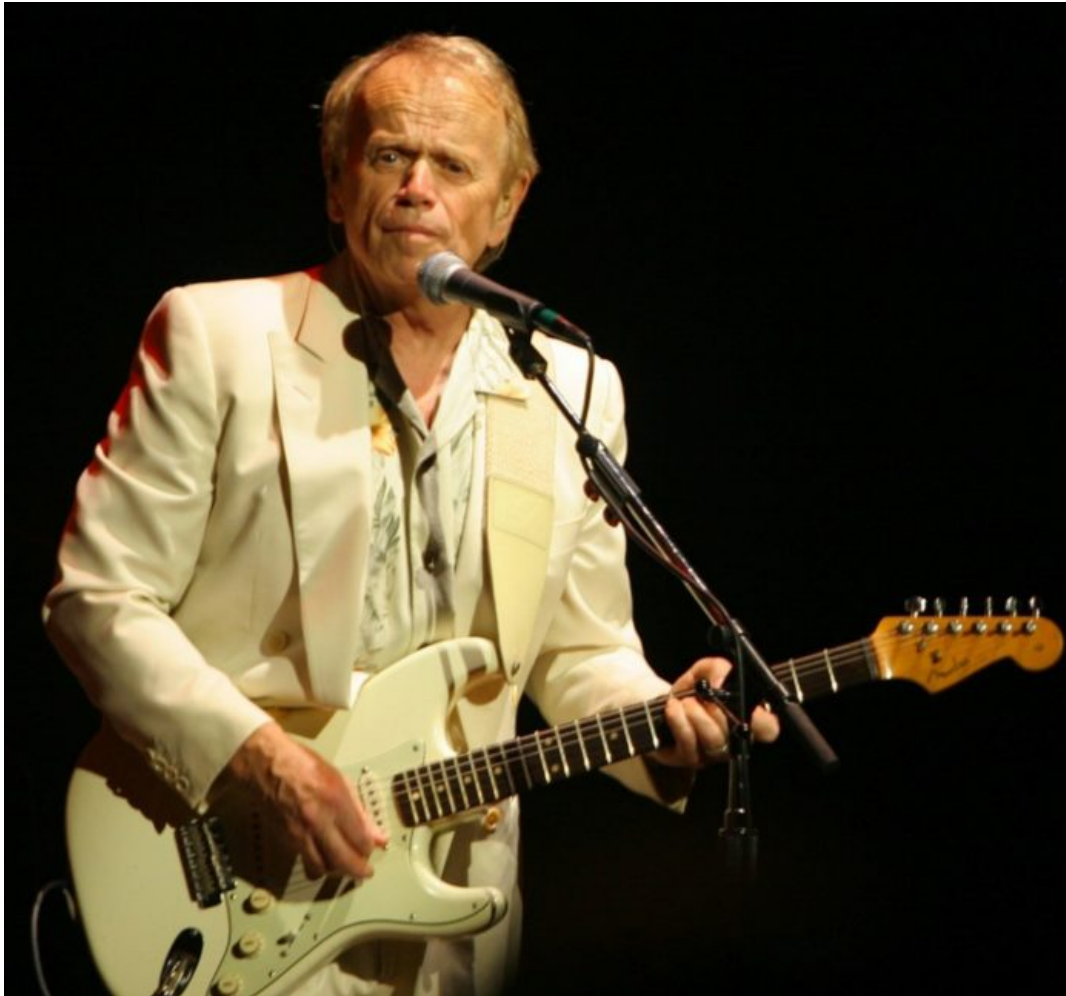


Surf's up for Beach Boy Al Jardine

Founding band member tells the stories behind the songs

By **Peter Jones** - August 19, 2019

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Former Beach Boy Al Jardine is telling the stories behind the songs on his "Postcard from California" tour.

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[Al Jardine](#) has had a long ride on the "Sloop John B."

In the mid-1960s, as a member of the [Beach Boys](#), he convinced leader [Brian Wilson](#) that the band should put its indelible mark on a traditional sea chantey. Although the adaption was not planned for the [Pet Sounds](#) album, it would become a signature track on the seminal record.

"I had it in my head what I thought it should sound like," Jardine said of the calypso ballad he first learned from a [Kingston Trio](#) record. "So I played [Wilson] the chords and then he did a really great arrangement on it. I thought this would be a great Beach Boys song."

It sailed to number three on *Billboard's* Hot 100 in 1966 and remained a seaworthy staple of the band's concert repertoire for decades.

Like folk songs themselves, Jardine's relationship with "Sloop John B." continued to evolve. In 2005, he reworked it as a children's book and recorded a new version for a sing-along CD. Illustrator Jimmy Pickering interpreted the whimsy with 27 pages of colorful drawings.

"It wrote itself fairly easily," the ex-Beach Boy said of the remake. "Some of the adaptations were kind of close to the original lyrics, but different."

Drunken sailors went overboard, of course, as did debauchery in Nassau. Instead, Jardine imagined a simple, child-friendly adventure of a boy and his grandfather. A run-in with pirates is what prompts the two to hoist-up their sails eventually. By then, the sea bandits have taken over the sloop and have undergone variations on the song's original plot points.

"So the pirate, instead of getting drunk, he got dunked," Jardine laughed. "He still ate up all the corn, whatever that means. I still haven't figured that one out."

The kids book is just one of several ships the singer has floated since unceremoniously leaving the Beach Boys after the 1998 death of co-founder and peacemaker Carl Wilson. A live CD, his first solo album *A Postcard from California*, and a solo storyteller tour are among the other projects. He has also joined fellow ex-Beach Boy Blondie Chaplin on tour as part of Brian Wilson's band.

Everybody's gone surfin'



The original Beach Boys: From left, Al Jardine, Carl Wilson, Brian Wilson, Dennis Wilson and Mike Love

Jardine entered the Beach Boys story as a neighborhood friend who joined the three Wilson brothers and their cousin on a near-mythic journey—an American epic as fraught with apocryphal legend, as it was, genius, tragedy, harmony, heroes, villains, bad and good vibrations. When Jardine could not convince Brian to start a folk trio, the Beach Boys were born after drummer Dennis Wilson, the only original Beach Boy who surfed, suggested the sport as the subject of a song.

"WE DIDN'T BUY THE [MUSICAL] EQUIPMENT WITH GROCERY MONEY," JARDINE REVEALED, DISPELLING A TRIED, BUT UNTRUE RUMOR. "IT IS EVEN [WRITTEN] ON OUR LANDMARK SITE [IN HAWTHORNE, CALIF.]. IT'S JUST TOO POETIC OR WHATEVER TO SAY THEY USED GROCERY MONEY."

It is true, however, that he quit the group shortly after its first single in 1961 to attend dental college. He jumped back on his board less than two years later when surfer girls and rock stardom started looking a lot better than plaque and decayed molars.

Jardine's highest-profile moment came in 1965, when he was tapped by Brian Wilson to sing lead on "Help Me, Rhonda," one of the Beach Boys' four No. 1 hits.

The band's greatest artistic success was arguably the influential *Pet Sounds* released the next year. Although "Sloop John B." was not recorded for it, the tune's homesick lyrics inadvertently fit with the record's overall themes of isolation and melancholy.

"The reason that song was put on that album was strictly financial greed on the part of the label," Jardine explained. "They wanted a hit song on there, and felt that would be a great way to sell the album because they didn't really understand the album."

In the late 1960s, after the famously aborted [Smile](#) album, Brian Wilson withdrew in every sense and the band's torch was sliced in pieces and passed to other Beach Boys. Jardine got space in edgewise for his folk-country ideas, around the same time that the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers were also bridging rock and Nashville twang.

Jardine's upbeat adaption of Leadbelly's "Cottonfields" mixed country, rock and Beach Boys vocal arrangements. It was a rousing concert showpiece and a huge chart success in Europe, Australia and Canada—virtually everywhere, in fact, except the United States.



The Beach Boys, including Al Jardine, left, perform in New York's Central Park in 1971.

For 1973's *Holland*, Jardine co-wrote "California Saga," an ambitious three-movement suite that examined the band's native state from historic, environmental and classic Beach Boys perspectives, incorporating a Robinson Jeffers poem into the folk-influenced epic.

"I think I overplayed that one," Jardine admitted. "It was a very serious poem in the middle, so I tried to keep all the lyrics in, but it got so ponderous. I didn't know what to do."

After the boys of summer have gone

In the wake of lawsuits galore with ex-band mate [Mike Love](#), Jardine now tours happily with Wilson and also with his son Matt on his *Postcard from California* solo shows, in which he tells the stories behind the hits, as well as lesser-known deep cuts.

Jardine's recent work has not seen the fanfare that accompanied Brian Wilson and his unexpected completion of *Smile* as a solo album, though both participated in a high-profile 2012 50th anniversary reunion tour and the first Beach Boys album of new material in 20 years. Still, Jardine enjoys playing Beach Boys classics in concert, albeit under a lower profile than in the band's heyday, and dusting off more esoteric songs in the *Postcard* shows.

In light of the nostalgia he revisited with respect to the historic designation of the now-leveled Wilson childhood home in Hawthorne, Jardine is quick to give much of the early credit to his parents, who contrary to legend, he says, were the ones who were willing to fund their son's first recording.

"To Virginia and Don Jardine," the singer-guitarist quoted from a new dedication, with emotion in his voice. "Thank you for giving and thank you for believing."

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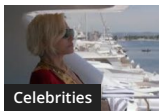
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Peter Jones is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster who has been a presence on the media scene for more than three decades. Since graduating from the University of Colorado School of Journalism, he has reported for Billboard, National Public Radio, America Online and The Christian Science Monitor, among others. In Colorado, Peter's work has appeared in 5280, The Colorado Statesman, and on Colorado Public Radio. He has also been a radio talk show host, most memorably for the controversial "Prove It!," where he delved playfully into the world of unproven claims and attracted a degree of international attention.



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