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Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

Music: “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Look, maybe I'm gonna get in trouble for saying this—catch some flack—but it is hard to think of an American rock band more distinct and influential than The Beach Boys. There is, of course, the songwriting: catchy and apparently effortless. You can hear “God Only Knows” on a solo piano or with a 20-piece band. It gets you every time.

Music: “God Only Knows” from the album *Pet Sounds* by The Beach Boys.

So, what good would living do me?

God only knows what I'd be without you

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: And then there's that 20-piece band. I'm not really exaggerating there. *(Chuckles.)* The core members of The Beach Boys were Brian, Carl, Dennis, Mike, and Al. But when it came time to lay down a song like “Good Vibrations”, they'd cram in as many session musicians as the studio would hold.

Music: “Good Vibrations” from the album *Smiley Smile* by The Beach Boys.

I'm picking up good vibrations

She's giving me the excitations

I'm picking good vibrations (good vibrations)

She's giving me...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: And there's the harmonies: the most Beach Boysie thing about The Beach Boys. You can hear any song of theirs, even one that never even got a proper release, like “Our Prayer”, and you know in an instant who you're hearing.

Music: “Our Prayer” from the album *20/20* by The Beach Boys.

Oooh, oooh...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: These days, there aren't many Beach Boys left. Dennis and Carl Wilson died in the 1980s and 1990s respectively. Their brother, Brian Wilson, was the band's main songwriter, producer, and creative force. He'd been mostly out of the band since the 1990s. And I'm sure you saw this in the news, but Brian Wilson died this past June. He was 82. Mike Love, singer and cousin to Brian, is still around and still touring as The Beach Boys. You can catch him on tour playing state fairs and casinos and whatnot. He also wrote “Kokomo”. And then there's my guest, Al Jardine.

Al was the rhythm guitarist. He's the only of the core Beach Boys who wasn't related to the Wilson family. He also sang lead vocals on a handful of their hits, including “Help Me, Rhonda”.

Music: “Help Me, Rhonda” from the album *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* by The Beach Boys.

Well, since she put me down

I've been out doing in my head

I come in late at night

And in the morning, I just lay in bed

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Jardine left The Beach Boys in 1998. He's toured solo ever since. He also toured extensively with Brian Wilson. They were close friends. He even sang lead vocals for the single on one of Wilson's last studio albums, *No Pier Pressure*.

Music: “Right Time” from the album *No Pier Pressure* by Brian Wilson.

Right, could it be the right

Could it be the right time?

For getting together

Right, could it be the right

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Jardine—like all the other Beach Boys—has a beautiful voice, a keen sense of harmony and melody, and he is also, as you're about to hear, one of the nicest and most sincere guys you could ever meet. Al just released an EP. It's called *Islands in the Sun*. Here's the title track.

Music: “Islands in the Sun” from the album *Islands in the Sun* by Al Jardine.

Send my love, send my love, send my love

Send my love, send my love, send my love now

Send my love, send my love, send my love now

Islands in the sun (islands in the sun)

Drifting slowly, one by one (one by one)

Now, wouldn't it be fun

If we could bottle up the sun?

(Send my love to everyone)

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Al, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to talk to you and get to meet you.

Al Jardine: Sure. Thank you for having me. That was quite a nice little...

Jesse Thorn: It's a nice vibe!

Al Jardine: Yeah. Vibe, thank you. That's a good term. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: When did you write that song?

Al Jardine: Oh, some time ago. I'm a big Belafonte fan. And it's probably '89/'90, something like that. I was thinking about my folk music years. Because I was initially attracted to folk music, and— Until I met Brian Wilson. *(Laughs.)* He wasn't a big fan of folk music. I had to show him how it worked. But at any rate, he showed me a lot more than I showed him. But about 1989/1990, I was thinking about Harry Belafonte and that beautiful islands vibe that he carried to America with him.

[00:05:00]

Brought to America, I should say. And it is really based on his— *Islands in the Sun* is my title. His theme was called "Island in the Sun". And I encourage anyone to pick up an album or—*(laughs)* pick up an album—that's funny. Go online and hear both songs. And you'll hear mine will be kind of—it will be like an arrangement on that song, only done in a Beach Boys style, and also some unique harmonies that Harry wouldn't have used. But his voice was so pure and wonderful. It's extraordinary. Actually, I'm a little embarrassed, to be honest with you, because he is so good.

Jesse Thorn: How would you describe The Beach Boys style? How would you describe those harmonies?

Al Jardine: It's Brian's vision of harmonic structure. And then he was very good at dealing out the parts to us. So, it was automatic. There really is no intellectual way to explain it. I once remember hearing a symphony—a composer, I should say—say that, you know, "You can't teach— We all have those same nine notes, but you can't teach anyone how to use them." I can't tell you how to write a melody. A good melody or a bad melody, for that matter. It's in your—it's your vision of it. Brian had the vision. He somehow, not only could write a beautiful melody, but arranged the parts around it so that it had structure. And then on top of that, he had a beautiful singing voice, as we all know.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, one of the things about Beach Boys records is that they sound like The Beach Boys no matter when the song was recorded. And the thing that sounds like The Beach Boys more than anything else, is that style of vocal harmony. Was that something that came naturally to you when you joined the band and started singing?

Al Jardine: I guess so. Yeah, I was a—I had my own folk group, and we structured our harmonies—our three-part harmonies, which we thought were pretty cool. *(laughs.)* And I was always—got a little—I was a little hard on the guys. I mean, I always—“You’re flat” or “You’re sharp.” You know, I was always—I still do that today, unfortunately. I have to apologize for myself to the guys. But Brian was that way with us too. So, I really learned from him how to conduct myself.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, if somebody sounds a little different in pitch, but they’re right on pitch in three of the four of the stacks, *(chuckles)* it gives it a little bit more sort of breadth and humanity.

Al Jardine: I think you’re talking about character.

(Jesse agrees.)

Dennis Wilson had that character. He was never perfect—and none of us are perfect. But he gave it—I liked his imperfectness. I think that’s what you mean. If you hear “409”, for instance, in “409”, his part’s just a little bit under, but it gives it a certain real—well, relatable. You know, it gives it character. Yeah, I agree.

Beyond that, *(chuckles)* when you’re getting into the Four Freshmen and the more esoteric—and the *Pet Sounds* and the *Smile*, you really need to nail it.

Music: “Good Vibrations” from the album *Smiley Smile* by The Beach Boys.

I, I love the color clothes she wears

And the way the sunlight plays upon her hair

I hear the sound of a gentle word

On the wind that lifts her perfume through the air

I’m picking up good vibrations

She’s giving me excitations

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: What's that like when you're in the studio? When you have to nail it?

Al Jardine: It's great. Oh, it's great nailing it. I remember just thinking, “Holy cow. Man. We just did one chorus, now we have to sing it all over again.” Well, after the early days, of course, we began to double track—which is a distinction between the early Beach Boys songs and later on. But sonically, it's fatter. You get—suddenly, the sound is just big. Double tracking, incredible. If you hear *The Beach Boys 40th Anniversary* box set, and you'll hear the acapella sessions? Whew! Just the voices.

Jesse Thorn: Were you usually singing with everyone in one room together?

Al Jardine: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. We never stacked. Everybody's around one mic. Until waaay later, like in the last century. *(Laughs.)*

[00:10:00]

I mean, in the new century. We had another producer come in and—did really good. He was a great producer. Actually, he was a really good producer. His name was Joe Thomas. And he would *(laughs)* have me go in and—all of us—and sing our part five times. Overdub five times, each part. I was listening to our album that he did that with called— It's a Brian Wilson album, actually. No Pier Pressure, it's called. I recommend that highly.

Music: “Tell Me Why” from the album *No Pier Pressure* by Brian Wilson, ft. Al Jardine.

Kinda funny, but mostly sad

Kinda good, but mostly bad

I really miss that thing we had

Until you went away

I think about the night we met...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: When you were recording in the '60s and Brian Wilson would give you the parts, were they always parts that you expected? Were they the harmonies that you would've chosen off the top of your head, or were they surprising harmonies?

Al Jardine: Oh, they were always perfect, in my opinion. Everything—we were just lucky. We just had this visionary hand out— It was like getting a birthday or a Christmas present every time you went to the mic. “Oh boy, I get that one?!” You know? But each one of us had our own structure within the band too. I was a tenor under Brian. Carl was under myself, and then there would be Dennis and Mike, in that order. So, everybody knew part they were gonna get. Well, Brian knew, obviously. So, he just— “Here go, Al. Here you go, Carl. Da-da-da-da. Okay, go.”

Jesse Thorn: I listened to an episode of *Fresh Air* the other day that was some interviews with Brian Wilson, mostly from the '80s and '90s. And one of the things that he said was he ended up singing the highest part, and he basically said, “Cause no one else wanted to sing like a girl.” (*Laughs.*)

Al Jardine: Awww, Bri. Aw, that's just— He had a wonderful sense of humor. And it was tough for him to identify with that after a while. After all, he was a full-grown adult singing these falsetto parts, you know? Right. And when you're a kid, it doesn't matter.

Jesse Thorn: And he sings so beautifully.

Al Jardine: But at some point he decided that he was not gonna do that anymore. And he tried to work his way out of it slowly but surely. And so, the formula changed, 'cause that was a huge part of the formula. He could still do it. I asked Brian to sing on one of my compositions, called “Don't Fight the Sea”.

Music: “Don't Fight the Sea” from the album *A Postcard from California* by Al Jardine.

I was out in a boat

That was gently afloat

When the wind started blowing on me

When the wind starts blowing

You better get going

You don't fight the sea

Don't fight the sea

Don't fight the sea

Don't fight the sea

I went onto the shore

I couldn't see anymore

And I tied my boat to a tree

I was messing around

When the tide went down...

(Music fades out.)

Al Jardine: And it required that part, and he delivered. I was really proud of him. I mean, I was really happy to have him on that particular— Because it was a strong melody, and he was pure Brian Wilson. I recommend that to anybody who's listening too.

Jesse Thorn: We've got so much more to get into with Al Jardine. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Al Jardine. He's a founding member of The Beach Boys, one of the greatest rock bands of all time. Since 1998, Jardine has performed as a solo artist touring all over the world. He also toured extensively with his fellow Beach Boys founder Brian Wilson. Jardine has a new EP out called *Islands in the Sun*. Al Jardine will be touring with the Brian Wilson Band, the band that he and Brian Wilson toured with for many years. Let's get back into our conversation.

There are these isolated vocal versions of Beach Boys songs on some of the boxsets and deluxe editions. And I pulled the vocal version of “God Only Knows”. “God Only Knows” is one of the greatest American popular music records ever recorded. And hearing it this way was pretty incredible for me. Why don't we listen to a little bit of it, and then maybe you can tell us a little bit about what's going on?

[00:15:00]

Music: “God Only Knows (*Acapella*)” by The Beach Boys.

God only knows what I'd be without you

If you should ever leave me

Well, life would still go on, believe me

The world could show nothing to me

So, what good would living do me?

God only knows what I'd be without you

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: What do you hear when you hear that?

Al Jardine: Well, I hear Carl Wilson interpreting Brian Wilson. Because initially, it would be Brian's lead. But he would—Brian would escape having to go out and reproduce it. If he had to go out on the—if we had to go out on the road and do it, he'd have to be there. So, his idea was, “I'll give the part to Carl.” And Carl did a great job. And then his emotional equivalence, I think of Brian's—they're very similar, tonality wise. Very heartfelt. And that's Brian doing the “ba-ba-ba”s, by the way.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, really?

Al Jardine: Yeah. Mike didn't make the session. So, “ba-ba-ba-ba-ba”, you know. Brian could do it all.

Jesse Thorn: Did you sing on that record?

Al Jardine: No. Mike and I—I don't know where we were. But altogether, a masterful piece.

Jesse Thorn: It must have been a pretty wild time to be recording two albums at the same time, having toured really hard—both before and afterwards.

Al Jardine: Yeah. Yeah, we were tuckered out.

(They chuckle.)

To say the least. Yeah, that was— But “God Only Knows” is gorgeous.

Music: “God Only Knows” from the album *Pet Sounds* by The Beach Boys.

God only knows what I'd be without you

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: It's very clear when you hear it that what he was hearing in his head and what he was writing was much more than a melody—that it wasn't just like taking a melody and adding band elements to it; that it was a much richer composition than that.

Al Jardine: With respect to *Love You*, it was actually a Brian Wilson album. And he was writing what he felt. It didn't need a big backup band and vocalists and singers to express himself. Although there are a couple of gems on there—I must say—that harken back to the Beach Boy days. And he had called me in to do a couple. And even Mike. Mike has the lead on there, and I do too. But most of it's Brian.

Jesse Thorn: Which is the one that you sang lead on?

Al Jardine: “Honkin’ Down the Highway”.

Music: “Honkin’ Down the Highway” from the album *Love You* by The Beach Boys.

Honking, honking down the gosh darn highway

Trying, trying to get past their cars

Got a, got a little date with an angel

She's the one that said she'd go with me

To see a little movie tonight

Honk, honk, honking down the highway

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: “Honkin’ Down the Highway”.

Al Jardine: *(Laughing.)* That’s what it’s called!

Jesse Thorn: It’s a great tune.

Al Jardine: It’s clever. It’s childish and wonderful. It’s all about dumb stuff. And it is just so perfect. And I’ve got a version of it on my album, my personal album, that we’re gonna do onstage. Because I added a baritone sax solo, which I think really brings it up to another level. Mike sings—what is it? “Roller Skating Child”. That’s his.

Music: “Roller Skating Child” from the album *Love You* by The Beach Boys.

Well, she’s a roller skating child

With a ribbon in her hair

She gets my heart to beating

When I see her there

You know my heart starts smiling when she sings

She’s such an angel, I bet she’s got wings

And we’ll make sweet loving when the sun goes down

We’ll even do more when...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: That’s another pretty goofy one. *(Laughs.)*

[00:20:00]

Al Jardine: I like that one too.

Jesse Thorn: It's a great song!

Al Jardine: It is. The lyrics are kind of smarmy. But you know, what are you gonna write, you know, about a roller skating child? But it's just—yeah, it's fun. Actually, it's fun and quirky. That's what's nice about this particular album—or performance.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, there's something wonderful in even the most lyrically unusual, goofy, or quirky Beach Boys songs. The way that those harmonies carry them is a really powerful experience. I mean, like I was telling you that on my way in, I was listening to a song called “Anna Lee, the Healer”.

Music: “Anna Lee, the Healer” from the album *Friends* by The Beach Boys.

Anna Lee, Anna Lee the healer

Healer with a healing hand

Makes you well as quick as she can

You'd love to see those smiling eyes of Anna Lee

From the Himalaya mountainside

Of the Rishikesh

To a California beach house

Facing towards the sea

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: This is a song with lyrics that are about a healer named Anna Lee. It's a very unusual subject for a song. The lyrics are slightly goofy. And it is the most beautiful song! *(Laughs.)*

Al Jardine: I know.

Jesse Thorn: I love it!

Al Jardine: Within all of that, it's just beautiful. I don't know.

Jesse Thorn: And it's not despite the lyrics. Like, the fact that the lyrics are that sort of odd, goofy plainness really compliments the song.

(Al agrees.)

It wouldn't be— If it was just about metaphors about horses or whatever other rock and roll songs are about—

(Al laughs.)

You know what I mean? It wouldn't have half the impact.

Music: “Take a Load Off Your Feet” from the album *Surf's Up* by The Beach Boys.

I do 'em when I'm down in the tub

With avocado cream, they'll take a rub

They wrinkle like-a raisins if I stay too long

I wouldn't wanna do it wrong

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: I was trying to explain to my daughter last night about the song “Take Care of Your Feet”.

(Al snorts a laugh.)

Music:

And to the table when you wanna eat

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: I really like the song “Take Care Of Your Feet”, which is about taking care of your feet! *(Laughs.)* If you're out there and you're wondering, “Is that a metaphorical song?” No, it's about taking care of your feet. It's about rubbing avocado oil on your feet.

Al Jardine: I know.

Jesse Thorn: And it's such a charming, lovely song.

Al Jardine: It is. That was Brian's line actually, the rubbing avocado oil. But I just thought, you know, I was— During the ‘70s, Birkenstock sandals were the big deal, and we were going through health issues. *(Chuckling.)* And that seemed like a pretty dumb idea, so I thought, “I'll get Brian to write a few lyrics and sing a verse.”

Jesse Thorn: I get the impression that part of your role in the band, especially at that time, was you were really good buddies with Brian Wilson from when you were a child, and you were a guy that was sober and wanted to get things done and could go in with Brian and say, “Let's goof around a little bit and get some songs finished.”

Al Jardine: Yeah. Yeah, we had to. We had to start working together as a group, 'cause Brian wasn't interested, really, in producing Beach Boy music anymore. So, we had to, you know, fill in the—with our own material. And we learned a lot from him. So, that was easy, to kind of just keep extrapolating that kind of stuff while he made the more heavyweight things like, um... There's so many that come to mind. This one is called “‘Til I Die”.

Music: “‘Til I Die” from the album *Surf's Up* by The Beach Boys.

I'm a cork on the ocean

Floating over the raging sea

How deep is the ocean?

How deep is the ocean?

(Music fades out.)

Al Jardine: And it's so profound. I don't know if you know that one. But it's—Brian had some heavy duty lifting going on. And at the time, that meant a lot to him. So, he corralled us around the mic again. And sure enough, we did it in like a half an hour. It didn't take that long.

Jesse Thorn: You have been touring both with your own band and with Brian Wilson and his band for many years.

(Al confirms.)

And often you have been sort of in the business of finding the special corners of The Beach Boys' catalogue.

[00:25:00]

What's a Beach Boys song that you really love or you really love to perform that isn't one of the hit records that we, you know, hear on the PA system in the grocery store?

Al Jardine: *(Chuckles.)* That's funny. I was in between rehearsals at a break. I just automatically started playing a song that Brian and I did on the—that the guys and I did, I should say, on the *Sacramento* live album. It's a double foldout; our first 1,000,000-selling live album. It's called "Graduation Day".

Music: "Graduation Day (*Live*)" from the album *Live in Sacramento 1964* by The Beach Boys.

Speaker: Right now, we'd like to do this song that was recorded several years ago by a group of singers who were very inspirational for our careers, because they influenced Brian Wilson and his writing. Their group is The Four Freshman, and their song that we'd like to sing right now is called "Graduation Day".

There's a time for joy

A time for tears

A time we'll treasure through the years

We'll remember always

Graduation day

At the senior prom...

(Music fades out.)

Al Jardine: So, I'm really tuned into that era. And that thing came flooding back into my head. And I started playing it. Everybody just stopped, and they listened to it, and they went, “Woow.” *(Laughs.)*

They were going, “What? Maybe we should open up the second set with that.”

“No, we'll put 'em to sleep.”

I don't know. Maybe we should do it just once I.

Jesse Thorn: I get the impression maybe that sometimes you have that feeling about these records that you participated in—that “wow” feeling.

Al Jardine: That “wow” feel—? Oh! Yeah. Well, it taught me a whole new language. Brian taught me a language. That's basically it. I learned—it's like learning Spanish or Italian. I learned his musical language and a lot of other stuff in addition to that. And because of that, I've become a lot more conversant. I can actually talk to the musicians about what I would like to hear.

But Brian, he was a spiritual—some say saintly—person. You know, I believe he was a messenger. I really do. You know, he himself said, “Music is the language of God. God's—” *(Laughs.)* I think he said it a little simpler terms. “Music is God speaking.” *(Laughs.)* That's what it was. That would be Brian. And I think he's pretty close to being right on with that. Because how do you do that stuff? It's gotta be his spiritual side. He's probably up there right now handing out the parts again for all I know. *(Laughs.)* To his brothers. Yeah.

Music: “Wouldn't It Be Nice” from the album *Pet Sounds* by The Beach Boys.

Wouldn't it be nice if we were older

Then we wouldn't have to wait so long

And wouldn't it be nice to live together

In the kind of world where we belong?

You know it's gonna make it that much better

When can say goodnight and stay together

Wouldn't it be nice if we could wake up

In the morning, when the day is new?

After having spent the day together

Hold each other close the whole night through

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: You yourself, who had been old friends with Brian Wilson—were in The Beach Boys at the very start, out of The Beach Boys for a while, then back into The Beach Boys. And then there was a brief period where you went to dental school. *(Laughs.)*

Al Jardine: That was before— I never went to dental school, I should say. But Brian and I were second year students at junior college. He was taking music. And I was trying to finish my undergraduate. I was determined to finish my degree. He didn't care. *(Laughs.)*

He said, "I already know it all. I'm outta here." *(Laughs.)*

So, I said, "Brian, I gotta hang in there. I gotta finish up."

So, I left the band until I finished my education. I got a call a few months later.

[00:30:00]

"Al, you gotta get back here. Please come back and join the band. I can't do this anymore. Dad wants me to go touring now. Like, I can't do it."

I said, "Well, I'll help you out."

So, *(laughs)* the next day I was on a plane to Cedar Rapids, Iowa or somewhere. *(Laughs.)* Except Brian forgot to tell his dad. Yeah, it was a little clumsy.

Jesse Thorn: And his dad was running the band at the time.

Al Jardine: Dad was road managing as well. Yeah. He was our road— That's what freaked Brian out too. He just—too much of the rub there. *(Laughs.)* And plus, we were starting to work on some serious music. You know, I mean, it all came together musically—perfectly,

actually. And he was able to stay home. I was able to sing his parts and play the bass. So, it all worked out in a way. Until David left. There's the—*(laughs)*.

I can give you a pretty long story here if you want, but to put it in a nutshell: David Marks and Murry didn't get along either. Same kind of thing. *(Laughs.)* He was fired. In comes Brian again. *(Laughs.)* So, we were all on the road again together. I'm sorry for David. But you know, it was like oil and water with those guys. So.

Then Brian had a nervous breakdown. And then lo and behold, there's Glen Campbell. He was available to finish our tour for us. Anyways, Brian's been in and outta the band—or had been in and outta the band for quite a few times.

Jesse Thorn: There's some serious mental illness in my family with people I really love. And they're in good spots right now, but I really know the feeling of having someone that you love going through really serious mental illness issues. One of the things that was difficult and scary for me that I was thinking of as I was thinking of your story was the feeling of losing track of the person you knew. Mental illness can be so dislocating. And it's a lonely and scary feeling to not be able to grab onto a person that you love.

Al Jardine: Yeah, Brian was engaging. He was never off-ish or, you know, rude. He was just withdrawn. He would take all that pain and suffering inside of himself, and he really didn't share that. So, we weren't really— It wasn't really clear that he was hearing voices in his head, for instance. And that would set him off, at times. But I don't think he was ever outwardly strange. He was just a man of few words and would say quirky things that make you laugh. Probably make— You know, that was his way of maybe relating. But I didn't know about his condition called—if there was a condition, uh—

Jesse Thorn: Schizoaffective disorder?

Al Jardine: Yeah. Schizophrenia. Yeah. Very common. And it gets worse as you get older. That I did find out. It doesn't get better. For some reason, it just... So, he was never quite comfortable. Which is too bad. But he had a great family. Everybody supported him. Everybody loved him. So, that I'm sure was a great help for him. He was something else. *(Laughs.)* He was an amazing person. And very—he always encouraged people to think of the music as an expression of love. He always used that word very greatly. Similar to Paul and John in their writing; they always used that word, love, to interject a feeling of— Well, of love in their music. And Brian really was pure love. I think that's how you would describe his music and his personality.

He was only mad at me once. He only got mad at me when I left the band. He had other plans. *(Laughs.)* And I screwed it up. But it all came back.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it seems to me from the outside like your connection to him as a friend—

[00:35:00]

—was so essential to him being able to contribute what he was able to contribute to The Beach Boys, long into The Beach Boys’ career.

Al Jardine: Well, if I hadn't have come back in, I don't know if he could have written some of that great stuff. Because it's not easy to write on the road—or compose, I should say. It's very difficult for some—all—most of us, I believe. It's just not— The environment isn't conducive to writing, particularly for a pianist. You know, you need a piano; you need a keyboard. We didn't have the luxury of those of the little electronic keyboards then.

(Jesse affirms.)

So, what do you do with yourself? *(Laughs.)* Well, one day, we were in the back of the bus, when—*(laughing)* when he had to come back into the band. We were in the Midwest somewhere. I think it was maybe Salt Lake, I don't know. And he sat bolt upright, *(laughs)* and he says, “I did it!”

I said, “What? What did you do?”

He says, “I wrote a song without a piano.”

(They laugh.)

Isn’t that funny? Turned out to be a pretty goofy song. I mean, it wasn't my favorite, but very ironic harmony. A very dissonant—almost atonal. It's kind of atonal.

Jesse Thorn: What song was it?

Al Jardine: It’s called “When I Grow Up *(To Be a Man)*”.

Music: “When I Grow Up *(To Be a Man)*” from the album *The Beach Boys Today!* by The Beach Boys.

When I grow up to be a man

Will I dig the same things that turned me on as a kid?

Will I look back and say that I wish I hadn’t done what I did?

Will I joke around (mm, still joke around) and still dig those sounds

(Ooh, still dig those sounds)

When I grow up to be a man?

(Music fades out.)

Al Jardine: Kind of really irritating harmonies in a way. *(Laughs.)* I never really thought—I never told Brian that, but it was a really big deal for him, you know?

Jesse Thorn: But I mean, also—besides the sort of practical consideration of you being—you know, you being on the road, meaning that he didn't have to be on the road sometimes, there's also— You know, as he reacted to his illness by withdrawing, you were someone who had a loving relationship with him, but did not carry the weight of his family.

Al Jardine: Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: You were sober.

Al Jardine: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. He was experimenting.

Jesse Thorn: And so, you were somebody that could go—you know, sort of go get him and draw him out a little a little bit in a way that other people weren't in a position to do, necessary.

Al Jardine: Yeah. Yeah. He had musical friends. He had—you know, in the community—that he could hang out with too. I was more isolated. I was trying to stay away from all the drugs and stuff, so I only showed up when there was a session or there was—you know. We actually would show up—every day, we'd have sessions at his house when we stopped making commercial records. You know, when we stopped making— When the hit machine stopped, we built a studio in his home. So, that was nice. We always— Every day we got together and worked. So. But we didn't have a social life, really.

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna go for a break. When we return, we will wrap up with Al Jardine of The Beach Boys. When we first booked Al to come on the show, it was before Brian Wilson passed. We talked to him shortly after Wilson's passing. We'll talk about their last moments together. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm talking with Al Jardine of The Beach Boys.

When he passed, did you know that he was mortally ill?

Al Jardine: *(Softly.)* Boy.

I did not know. I saw him about a month ago, and he was... he was okay. He was okay. He was on oxygen at the time, but that's not unusual when you have—when you need oxygen. But I didn't think that was mortal.

Jesse Thorn: And he had had COVID a few years ago and had been a little weaker since then?

Al Jardine: Yeah, that's a good point. I had just learned that, yeah—that he had long term—they call it long-term COVID. And that may have had something to do with it. But he was in kind of good spirits. He walked up to me— Well, not walked up. I walked up to him, actually, when we came into the house.

[00:40:00]

He looked at me, and he said, “You started the group.” (*Laughs.*)

And I said, “Well, thanks Brian, but I think you got something to do with it too.”

(*They laugh.*)

Isn't that funny? It's probably because, when I got the phone call and I said I'd be there—he's probably right! I mean, you know, in many ways. 'Cause I was anxious to get going. I wanted to record a folk song. I didn't know anything about this surfing stuff. You know, none of us surfed. Except Dennis. I thought we were gonna record “Sloop John B”. That was my whole focus. And then his brother comes up with this idea. And interestingly, we would rehearse on Four Freshman material, which was a musical treat for all of us. And Brian was happy to share it. So, we were able to have both worlds—both of those worlds, but not the folk world.

So, I had to wait for a while. But I was able to get through to him one day. And I sat down to the piano, and I played a few chords, and a few additional chords for the Beach Boy harmonies. Bang. The next day we had a we had a record. He just—he got it. Isn't that nice?

Jesse Thorn: That's an incredible record too.

Al Jardine: Yeah, it is.

Jesse Thorn: It might be my favorite Beach Boy song, honestly.

Al Jardine: Whew! What a production! Man!

Music: “Sloop John B” from the album *Pet Sounds* by The Beach Boys.

We come on the sloop John B

My grandfather and me

Around Nassau Town, we did roam

Drinking all night

Got into a fight

Well, I feel so broke up

I wanna go home

So, hoist up the John B's sail

See how the mainsail sets...

(Music fades out.)

Al Jardine: Unfortunately, the publishers forgot to put my name on the record.

(Jesse muffles a laugh.)

But we may—someday, I may get—*(laughs)* I doubt now, but you never know. Brian always would always say, “Hey, this is a little thing Al and I cooked up, blah, blah, blah, blah.” But his managers didn't want to hear about it. Because, you know, it takes revenue outta your—you know. And they don't have to put my name on it. But at least people know it was a good idea.

Jesse Thorn: Brian Wilson was alive when we booked this interview, and you had even planned or hoped to have him perform with you in the local dates of your tour.

(Al confirms.)

And you know, you are probably the Beach Boy who has toured the most extensively with Brian Wilson in the years that he has not been in The Beach Boys. It must really change the way you think about presenting your own work and presenting these Beach Boys songs to think that you're doing it in a world without him.

Al Jardine: I know. That's my concern. I don't know how people will accept that. But the band is so... so good and devoted to him that I think it'll come across.

Jesse Thorn: And the band that you're touring with is largely his band. It's also—you know, it's always been family members and people who have been in The Beach Boys over the years. But most of your band now is essentially the Brian Wilson Band.

Al Jardine: The Brian Band, yeah. Yeah, one of the fellas passed away—Nick Walusko. Probyn's on tour with the accordion player Big Al—not Big Al. Uh, Weird Al. *(Laughs.)*

So, other than that, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I think Al would be grateful to be described as the accordion player.

Al Jardine: *(Laughing.)* The accordion player.

Jesse Thorn: Or Big Al, yeah. I think he'd take either one.

Al Jardine: He's amazing. Anyway, Matt Jardine is my Brian Wilson.

Jesse Thorn: He's your son.

Al Jardine: Yeah. Without that voice— Well, I don't know. I suppose there are people that can sing that way, but Matt is Brian's handpicked.

Jesse Thorn: He's been like literally touring with The Beach Boys and Brian Wilson and you since he was a child.

Al Jardine: Oh, yes. Absolutely. So, he's really got it all down. So, I'm real proud of that. I believe we're going to have— At least for the LA dates, we're gonna have—his piano will be on stage with us. I'm gonna have that piano up there with an empty chair. And Matt and I'll be on either side of the piano, the way we did it when he was with us.

[00:45:00]

Jesse Thorn: In a way, it's an opportunity to share with that audience that loves you and him and The Beach Boys—that love that's still there in his absence.

Al Jardine: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. It would've been wonderful to have him at rehearsals, but I didn't realize he wasn't able to do that. His back gave out too. He had this nasty back problem, and he couldn't walk without a walker. And he didn't want to be seen that way. And it was just hard for him to get just get in and out of a bus—or up on a stage for that matter. So, that was tough. It was hard on him.

Can I do a shout out to a Canadian friend of mine—?

Jesse Thorn: Sure.

Al Jardine: —who's also not doing very well right now. His name's Terry Jacks. He wrote “Don't Fight the Sea”. It's like an anthem to me. So, I just wanna say: hi, Terry. I hope you're feeling better. Get well.

Jesse Thorn: Have you had that impulse since Brian Wilson died that you have sometimes when someone's gone, where you think to call them or stop by their house or send them a note, and then you realize they're not there to get it?

Al Jardine: Yeah. *(Beat.)* Yeah, it's one of those things, I guess. Yep. Hey, Bry. Thinking of you

Jesse Thorn: Thank you so much for talking to me about him.

Al Jardine: Mm-hm. It's my pleasure.

Jesse Thorn: And Al, thanks so much for this beautiful record. I'm looking—we're all looking forward to seeing you on tour.

Al Jardine: *(Laughing.)* Aww, thanks. Yeah, maybe we'll have some—you know, have some fun. That's the whole idea, right?

Jesse Thorn: Al Jardine, the nicest guy. A true rock legend. His latest release is *Islands in the Sun*. Let's hear one more tune from that record. This is one that's very important to Al. It's called “My Plane Leaves Tomorrow”, and it features guest vocals from Neil Young.

Music: “My Plane Leaves Tomorrow” from the album *Islands in the Sun* by Al Jardine.

I just joined the army

I don't know why

Had no place to go

Thought I'd give it a try

My plane leaves tomorrow

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun—as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking

beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. If I'm a little hoarse, it's because last night I went to the grand opening of the Blue Note LA, the new Blue Note Jazz Club in Los Angeles. I got to see Robert Glasper with special guests; including another past *Bullseye* guest, Terrace Martin; two of the greatest singers in the world, Lalah Hathaway and Ledisi. And I have to tell you, all those legends on the stage, and I think the star of the show was a drummer named Justin Tyson. So, if you get a chance to see that dude, he's incredible.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help on *Bullseye* from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at DJWsounds.bandcamp.com. Our theme music was written and recorded by the great band The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all our interviews, including the ones you heard this week. So, please go do follow *Bullseye* on Instagram and TikTok and YouTube. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

Music:

It's not too late for love

Too late to say your mind

My plane leaves tomorrow...

(Music fades out.)