

# Talking to a Beach Boy: Interview with Mike Love

By Karrie Carlson, Daily Journal Media, May 24, 2025

Sometimes in life, things happen and you have to pinch yourself to make sure it's really happening. That is what it felt like last week when I had the chance to talk to Mike Love from The Beach Boys. He called me ahead of their concert on May 16 at Shooting Star Casino. Before the concert started, I was able to go backstage and meet him and Bruce Johnston, another member of the group, in person. Johnston told joke after joke and was entertaining to speak to. Love was calm and gracious. The concert was amazing, as I knew it would be.

Here is the conversation I had with Love:

**Carlson:** "What makes you want to keep touring year after year? Is it the music, the fans, maybe both?"

**Love:** "First of all, music has been a life-long family hobby and then a long lasting profession. My cousin Brian (Wilson) and I sat together and wrote some songs that people still love hearing to this day. But I'd have to say it's the audience response, the main reason why we keep doing these things. You know, if there wasn't any demand, I don't think we'd go out. As long as people want to hear us, and hear the songs we created, we're very blessed to be able to do that – we are musicians that have spent their whole life in music. You know?"

**Carlson:** "Who all is on the tour with you?"

**Love:** "Well the longest member to tour besides myself is Bruce Johnston, who joined us in 1965 after Glen Campbell was with us for a couple months. After my cousin Brian, in late 1964, he decided he didn't want to tour anymore which was a bummer. It was a real drag for us because we missed him a lot but he was not happy on the road, so effectively for all these years, there's been two groups: there's been the recording group and the touring group. Of course the touring group has still been active to this day, whereas the recording group, we lost my cousin Carl (Wilson) 27 years ago to lung cancer. We lost my cousin Dennis (Wilson) who was our drummer, in 1983. He just couldn't get over the drugs and alcohol and stuff and I think that contributed to his early demise.

"But we have a guy from Apple Valley who's our musical director, his name is Brian Eichenberger. He was 18 years with The Four Freshman, a recent incarnation thereof, of course, before he joined our group. And he does those high parts that my cousin Brian did on the original recordings and he does them beautifully. So we can replicate those songs, because I'm the lead singer in many of them. My son, Christian Love, he does 'God Only Knows' from our 'Pet Sounds' album and the lead on 'Good Vibrations,' which are leads my cousin Carl did. But he sounds wonderful on them, he's really good. So we have a lot of great vocalists in our group, a fantastic drummer, all the necessary ingredients to recreate those songs as close as humanly possible to the original recordings."

**Carlson:** "On the day of shows, do you have a routine you do, like voice rest the days before, or is your body just used to performing now?"

**Love:** "Well we always do vocal warm-ups because we find that having done so we're ready to sing right out of the gate, from the first note, our voices are warmed up, so we do that. But before that I like to do my meditation; transcendental meditation which was taught to me by Maharishi in the summer of 1967. I've been doing that for many years and it's kept me relaxed and calm and energetic enough to do all these shows. And kept me from choosing different lifestyle choices that aren't so beneficial for relaxation or energy. There's all too many people who have succumbed to that. With the

meditation, you feel relaxed and good and you don't need any help from pharmaceuticals or non-prescribed drugs. So that's been a big help to me that last several decades."

**Carlson:** "Does the set list change or do you have songs you know people want to hear so you just stick to a setlist?"

**Love:** "We always do basic sections of the setlist. For instance, I like to start out retro, start out in the beginning, doing our surfing songs: 'Do it Again,' 'Surfin' Safari,' 'Surfing U.S.A.,' 'Catch a Wave,' 'Hawaii.' There's one called 'Don't Back Down[' that's fun. So that's the first few songs in our show.

"And then we'll do 'Surfer Girl,' then probably 'Don't Worry Baby,' and then some of the car songs; 'Little Deuce Coupe,' '409,' 'Shift Down' and 'I Get Around.' I think those songs really get the audience going. And for our original fans, they're nostalgic, but also for their kids and grandkids. Lets say a grandkid is just discovering music, the entire family can enjoy our songs. We see a lot of that, specifically at state fairs and stuff like that when the whole family comes out for the day."

**Carlson:** "I'm a middle generation. My parents listened, then me and now my children do as well."

**Love:** "That's awesome! And of course you saw us on Full House reruns."

**Carlson:** "I saw it live the first time it was on! That had to have been a fun experience."

**Love:** "It was great because John Stamos was a drummer before he was a t.v. star. We've known him since he was Blackie on General Hospital, before he was Uncle Jesse. In 1988, 'Kokomo' went to number one and It's said to be our biggest selling single. And people sing along to that like crazy. You know, the whole audience will sing along with us which is fantastic."

**Carlson:** "I was in fifth grade when that came out and it was big! It was one of the songs on the radio that was appropriate for kids to sing, compared to some of the other songs that were out. That's one thing I've enjoyed about your music over the years. Even listening with my kids, it's something you can listen to without blushing while listening to it with your kids."

**Love:** "Exactly!"

**Carlson:** "There are a lot of songs now that they'll sing the first few words to and it's like, 'We've got to change that. That's not what we're listening to.'?"

**Love:** "Yea, we've always accentuated the positive. Even 'Good Vibrations,' which was created during, while the Vietnam War was going on, student unrest going on, there were integration issues. But I wanted to do a song about a girl that was all into peace and love and flower power and all good things. So I just did this poem. Two years ago, a psychologist in Sheffield, England said that 'Good Vibrations' is the number one song for making people feel good. And that is many years later. From 1966 to, let's say, 2024. So that's a pretty phenomenal thing."

**Carlson:** "Was the laid back surfer vibe of your music something you guys aimed to do, or just where you were at that point in your life or was it something you wanted to bring to the audience?"

**Love:** "You know, some of the songs have an upbeat tempo, but it's the harmonies that penetrate the brain and go to the heart. Our friend John Stamos says that's heart music. So people feel good when they listen to the songs. They're not controversial, but just positive and uplifting and fun. And then the warmth of those harmonies makes you feel emotionally good. And it does us as well on stage . It feels great that we are able to recreate those songs and that the audience loves them as much as they do. People will be singing along like crazy to the last several songs of our show."

**Carlson:** "If there was one song that you could pick to never perform again, if you could pick one, is there one that you have just overperformed, or do all of them just have their moments?"

**Love:** "There are occasions when we get burned out on a particular song so we just retire it for a while. Since we have enough songs to choose from, we don't have to suffer that problem too much. They all have their personalities and their tempos, and melodies and different chords, so they're at least interesting from one song to the next. They aren't identical like some people release a single, and then the follow up will be almost identical. We have all kinds of tempos and sounds and lead singers. You know, my cousin Brian would sing the lead on 'Don't Worry Baby,' whereas I sing the lead on 'I Get Around' and 'Fun, Fun, Fun' and 'California Girls.' My cousin Carl would sing 'God Only Knows' and 'Good Vibrations' lead. And 'Help Me Rhonda' was sung by Alan Jardine, one of the other group members. So you see, we have a lot of different varieties of lead singers, and tempos and subject matters, which keeps it interesting, doesn't get boring."

**Carlson:** "When you play a song, are there times now where you remember a certain place or certain time?"

**Love:** "Oh yeah!"

**Carlson:** "Like it takes you right back to that time?"

**Love:** "Absolutely! There's a song called 'Surfing Safari' that was a hit for us in 1962. We were at a ballroom out on Lake Minnetonka, outside of the Twin Cities, and this was a place where a lot of people would go to hear bands and stuff, and we would do four sets a night. We'd do 45 minutes then take a break, then another 45 minutes and take a break. At the second break, my cousin Brian and I went outside and I looked down the road and people were breaking the windows of the place to get in and there were still cars coming down the road, you could see the lights coming down the road, and people were still wanting to get in. And I said, 'Gee, this must be what it was like when Elvis started out.' The demand was there even early on. So by 1963, 'Surfing U.S.A.' was even a bigger hit. Then we had 'I Get Around' and 'Fun, Fun, Fun' then 'California Girls.' You know, 'Good Vibrations' was probably the biggest hit we had in the '60s, it went to one in 1966 and we were voted the number one group in Great Britain, number two being The Beatles. Which is an amazing thing."

**Carlson:** "Have you collaborated with other groups over the years? Do you have a favorite?"

**Love:** "We did some music with a group called Locash, which is a country group. And they just had a number one country record called 'Hometown Home.' But they did a song called 'Beach Boys' where it was guys from Nashville heading to where the map turns blue, meaning the Gulf of America, of course. But anyway, they made up this song and they asked if we would participate in it so we sure did. It was fun to do, and they're doing a few shows with us as an opening act."

"We've had dozens of opening acts over the years and some really great ones that gained tremendous popularity. Billy Joel was an opening act and he's had a tremendous career. Buffalo Springfield, they're a great band, but Neil Young and Stephen Stills were in that band. Crosby, Nash, Stills and Young, we've had concerts with them as well. Yea, we've had a tremendous amount of pairings with groups. A limited amount of recording with them, although we did the backgrounds for an Elton John song, 'Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me.' So our sound is heard on that recording. From time to time we'll do things like that."

**Carlson:** "You grew up with music around you and music education is important to you. Can you tell me a little about that?"

**Love:** "Well my music education was at home. My mom loved opera music. She would play her opera music to get us to get up to go to school, which was traumatic I must say. We had a grand piano, an

organ and a harp in our living room and I have two sisters who play on the harp. One of them played on a couple of our earlier songs, my sister Maureen. Every birthday, every holiday, Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Years, Fourth of July, you name it, it was all about music. We'd all get together and the parents would have their songs and the kids would have their songs. My cousin Brian and I liked doo-wop, as well as Everly Brothers, as well as Chuck Berry, but my cousin Carl really loved Chuck Berry because he played guitar. Brian was a keyboard player. He played bass with us for a few years when we first started out until he quit the touring group. But it was always about music. Every get together had a musical component to it. We'd actually Christmas carol around the neighborhood at Christmas time."

**Carlson:** "Do you still have big family gatherings like that?"

**Love:** "Well, we've lost two cousins, Carl and Dennis. And Brian has tremendous mobility issues. But we did get together for The Beach Boys documentary on the Disney Channel. I think it's still streaming, it came out last year. There was this part where we went to Paradise Cove, which was the location where we did our first album cover. We got together there for the final shot of this Disney documentary. We reminisced and sang some songs together. So it was a very sweet get together."

**Carlson:** "Thank you so much for your time Mr. Love."

**Love:** "Every year we seem to come back to Minnesota and it always reminds me of that time on Lake Minnetonka."

**Carlson:** "What a special memory for you."

**Love:** "It sure is."