

## Brett Simons



What happens when a legend covers a legend? With the release of Brian Wilson *Reimagines Gershwin*, The Beach Boys mastermind provides an answer as he tackles the inimitable catalog of George Gershwin. The results are every bit as stunning as we have come to expect from Mr. Wilson. While covering such a familiar and classic body of work would yield some hesitation from many, Wilson handles it with aplomb offering fresh re-interpretations of these oft-recorded classics.

For bassist Brett Simons, the pressure could have been insurmountable - not only was he playing with one of the most revered songwriters in the history of pop music but they would now, as a band, be covering the works of one of America's greatest composers. From first listen, it sounds like the pressure was not an issue for Simons who deftly anchors and propels the album from the swinging *They Can't Take That Away From Me* to the Bossa Nova-styled take of *'S Wonderful*.

Simons, whose track list is as long as it is varied, brings a real-world work ethic to every project he embarks upon. "Whenever walking into a studio or live situation, be ready for anything that comes at you. You're there to support, so know what you're hired for, know your part and then bring your personality into it".

### ***What was the approach for the new record, Brian Wilson Reimagines Gershwin?***

It was an interesting experience because there is a high level of comfort and trust between members of Brian's band in the studio. I'm one of the newer members of the ensemble; a lot of the guys have been with Brian's solo career for the better part of 10 years. So even though I've only been with him for two years, I feel like there is a sense of family.

Going into the studio was really a co-collaborative experience between Brian's vision for the project and Paul Von Mertens, the saxophonist and arranger, honing the arrangement side of things. We would go in with skeletons of some of these Gershwin classics, and just form them – the way Brian used to make records 40 years ago! We were at Ocean Way Studios with partitions up between the amps – of course my Aguilar rig was there, mic'd up along with the D.I – and we just sorted it out and finessed the arrangements as we went along. We all contributed our parts because it was really an open palate for us.

### ***So there were no hard and fast rules on the arrangements? The musician's had a certain degree of flexibility?***

That's right. Paul Von Mertens came in with some chord charts, and a skeletal idea of how some things might blend together – there are a couple of tunes that segue into one another – and then we, as an ensemble, ran with that and recorded live in the studio.



***How long did the whole process take?***

It came along very quickly considering how some artists, particularly in pop music, chip away at things like sounds and arrangements kind of tirelessly! We were just about to begin a leg of last fall's tour - I think it was around mid/late October and we had about three days before embarking on the tour. So we went in there and kind of stripped away and got most of it done! We did the rhythm tracks in three days. We came back for another two days in December and then again in late January or early February for another date. We recorded at Ocean Way mainly but that last date was at Henson.

***What was your rig for the sessions?***

I used my [DB 750](#) and [GS 212](#) and also an [AG 500SC](#), which I loved! It worked remarkably well in the studio – it has a really clear sound – slightly different than the DB 750 but just as useful. We combined that with the direct signal.

***Was there any upright work for you on this album?***

There was indeed – I'd say it was about 50-50. I come from a decidedly Jazz/ improvisational music background. For me, it was really interesting to bring that knowledge of the Gershwin songbook to this project without edging it that way too much because Brian's "stamp" was for it to have a different angle. But the album does have some of that jazz swing feel with Brian's quirky arrangement ideas and, of course, those beautiful layered harmonies.

***Did you amplify your upright?***

We did a couple of times. I like to take a mic direct and amplify the upright as well. I'm not sure how much of that was used on this in the mix but it is a great sound. The cabinets, both the GS and the DB cabinets, register really well on an upright bass. Especially the 212 configuration; I really enjoyed that on upright bass.



***Did Brian give any input on the bass parts?***

There were some tunes where Brian would say, “Hey Brett, are you playing with a pick?” and I was actually tracking with upright! It was funny, I would respond “Brian I’m on upright right now” and he would say, “Well ok, when you’re done with that, I want you to pick up your Fender and double it with a pick bass”! So it was kind of recreating that old, ‘tic-tac’ sound that he used on a lot of his older records. I ended up having to keep my lines in mind – whatever I played on upright – so I could double them verbatim on the electric. And it turned out really nice!

***That sounds like an interesting challenge since you weren’t just recreating an upright line on electric – you were doubling that line.***

Yeah, you know, they’re not the most intricate parts but I’m a stickler for detail and maybe going into a bridge the first time, I laid into it differently the second time or the double chorus on the out, there were certain things I did. Sometimes Brian doesn’t want it verbatim. There’s something about the slightly off-kilter part, like accidentally playing the 5th or a 3rd that works really well as long as it’s cleanly performed.

***Thank you Brett for talking to us to us today!***

Visit Brett Simons online at - <http://brettsimons.com> For information on his recording studio, The Tin Room, click [here](#).