From the Editor



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EDITOR

It's a gray and extraordinarily rainy afternoon, and my XM satellite radio is keeping me company as I wade through a stack of page proofs. XM Cafe (channel 45) is broadcasting a live, in-studio interview with Brian Wilson—he's bantering with the host, talking about his life and playing bits of his music on the piano. What emerges is a portrait of Wilson as the classic tortured creative genius.

Beset by a host of mental problems, influenced by people who didn't have his best interests at heart and troubled by a history of drug abuse, Wilson is nonetheless regarded as one of America's finest songwriters, period. While he was clearly the driving force behind the hugely influential 1966 Beach Boys album "Pet Sounds," the radio interview revealed something interesting: Wilson's voice isn't his best asset. Perhaps it was the casual setting, without all the fancy audio equipment to smooth and polish the sound, but his voice was rough and thin. His piano playing was adequate, but certainly not masterful.

In contrast, listening to Beach Boys songs played throughout the session, it was amazing to hear the results of one man's creative vision magnified and beautified by the rest of the band. The instrumentation and harmonies surround Wilson's lead vocals and piano to create a sound that takes your breath away. Wilson's music couldn't exist without the Beach Boys; the Beach Boys couldn't exist without Wilson's genius. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As it is with all great creative efforts.

It's like the quote from Sir Isaac Newton: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Our most groundbreaking ideas don't come in a vacuum; they come when we open our minds to outside input. In fact, the absolute worst circumstance for generating a fresh idea is when you're working alone. Think of how agonizing it is to sit by yourself at the computer or drawing board and face down the challenge of creating. Hell, even kicking around ideas with your client is preferable to brainstorming solo.

This issue is all about creative teamwork in some form or another: couples (spouses, siblings, partners) who work together and inspire each other. A pair of designers who have forged a cross-country collaboration that's resulted in award-winning work and a solid friendship. An online community that invites designers to exhibit their creative musings.

And, for when you inevitably do find yourself alone at the keyboard, we've got a few exercises that will help stretch your mental muscles and shake up your creative juices. Just grab a cup of java, pick up a pencil and cue up some music for inspiration. "Pet Sounds," perhaps?

