

## Revolutionizing The Rum Journey

An Interview with Michael E. Love, Founder, Club Kokomo Spirits



Michael E. Love

**EDITORS' NOTE** Grammy® Winner and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Member, Michael Love grew up under the Southern California sun where he soaked up a life of music, surf, sand and sport. Beginning his singing career as a young boy, Love along with his cousin, Brian Wilson, frequently sang at family get-togethers and holiday gatherings. These early influences served as the inspiration to form the legendary group, The Beach Boys, which originally consisted of Love and his cousins, Brian, Dennis, and Carl Wilson along with neighbor David Marks and high school friend Alan Jardine. In the fall of 1961, Love wrote the lyrics and melody to The Beach Boys' first song, "Surfin'," in collaboration with cousin Brian Wilson, and subsequently "Surfin' Safari" and "409," which led to the signing of the band by Capitol Records. Following the song's debut, Love and Wilson went on to co-author numerous hits, including eleven Top

10 singles in the first five years of the band. Hit after hit, Love created many of the concepts, and wrote or co-wrote the lyrics and hooks to several of the most performed songs in pop music history including "Good Vibrations," "Fun, Fun, Fun," "I Get Around," "Surfin' Safari," "Help Me Rhonda," "Do It Again," "Kokomo," "Surfin' USA," and "California Girls," which was Bruce Johnston's debut track as a member of The Beach Boys. For more than 50 years, Love has been the lead singer and front man of The Beach Boys, taking the sounds of America's band to every corner of the globe. His distinctive and iconic vocal range is synonymous with fast-paced rock 'n' roll tracks, as well as many of the band's softer ballads. In December 1967, The Beach Boys were invited to Paris to perform at a benefit for UNICEF. The curtain opened to a very distinguished front row, including Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, George Harrison,

and John Lennon. At Maharishi's invitation, Love, along with Carl, Alan and Dennis, were initiated into the practice of Transcendental Meditation. Love was profoundly affected by the first meditation experience, stating, "If enough people were to practice TM, the world would be a better place." He continues to practice TM today and supports organizations such as the David Lynch Foundation which promote the vast benefits of Transcendental Meditation. In 1988, Love and the other members of The Beach Boys were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. That same year, Love co-wrote the #1 hit "Kokomo," with John Phillips of the Mamas and Papas, and producer Terry Melcher. This was 22 years after Love co-authored the Beach Boys' #1 hit of the 60's, "Good Vibrations," – marking the longest span of time between number one records of any artist in music history. Both "Good Vibrations" and "Kokomo" were nominated for Grammy® awards. "Kokomo" was also nominated for a Golden Globe® Award. In 2001, the band was the recipient of the Grammy® Lifetime Achievement Award. Love has been at the forefront of numerous charitable efforts, using his platform to support a wide range of causes. In 1990, he responded to President George H. W. Bush's call for service by founding StarServe, an initiative aimed at motivating young people towards community service, showcasing his early commitment to philanthropy. His philanthropic efforts were recognized when he and his wife, Jacquelyne, received the prestigious Points of Light Award, highlighting his significant contributions to volunteer service and impacting lives across the globe. Through the Love Foundation, he has supported initiatives focusing on education, health, environmental conservation, and disaster relief, showcasing a legacy of compassion and service alongside his storied musical career.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Club Kokomo Spirits ([clubkokomospirits.com](http://clubkokomospirits.com)) pledges to revolutionize the rum journey. In its San Diego distillery, Club Kokomo Spirits blends tradition with innovation to ensure every sip delivers an unforgettable experience. From artisan-crafted, additive-free rums to its award-winning ready-to-drink cocktails, it hopes clients savor the harmony of flavors that sets Club Kokomo apart.





*Club Kokomo cocktails*

**Will you highlight The Beach Boys' career journey?**

Over the last decades, we've had so many highlights to our career journey, for instance, hearing our first recording of "Surfin" on the radio in the fall of 1961. It was incredibly exciting to see songs such as "Surfin' Safari" and "Surfin' USA" become hits in countries all around the world – countries from Israel, Australia, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, and Germany. We have had fan letters from Russia, China, and even the Middle East. We were voted the best group in Great Britain in 1966 on the strength of "Good Vibrations" going to #1. Twenty-two years after "Good Vibrations," our song "Kokomo" went to #1 and it's said to be the largest-selling single of the group's career. It also marked one of the longest spans between number one records of any musical group. Our performances on the hit television series, *Full House*, were seen by millions of people over many generations. With respect to live performances, our concerts on July 4th in the mid-80s resulted in over 1.5 million people witnessing both from the Washington Monument grounds and from within the streets of Philadelphia, some of the largest concert crowds on record still to this day. More recently, in partnership with Disney, we released a documentary on The Beach Boys. The documentary premiered on May 24th, 2024, and was brought to theaters all across the nation. The documentary was fantastic, and I feel it reignited a deep interest in our music and story. It is now available for streaming on the Disney+ platform. But the highlights keep coming, as I was very recently inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, with

its gala taking place in New York City on June 12th of this year. We will also be performing this year's Capital 4th, being broadcast as well as streamed on PBS.

For me, it's a true blessing to perform our music for millions of people around the world year after year, as I continue to perform over 100 shows every year. This has been my journey for over six decades now.

**Where did you develop your passion for music?**

There has never been a time in my life when music was not a part of my reality. I grew up in a home in Los Angeles with a large living room with a grand piano, an organ, and a harp. My sister played the harp in our songs "Catch a Wave" and "In My Room." But my cousins Brian, Carl, and I would get together and sing and harmonize as a family at every holiday and family gathering. That upbringing led to my cousin Brian and I getting together to write songs that would later become part of the American soundtrack. There is a psychologist in Sheffield, England who set out to research which songs made people feel the happiest. He tested many songs across 2,500 respondents, and he found that "Good Vibrations" was #1 for making people happy. In fact, we had two in the top ten, including "I Get Around" at #8. The joy that these songs create is so special and I feel blessed to be able to continue this family tradition to this day.

**Will you discuss the Club Kokomo Spirits story and what your vision was for creating the company?**

Years ago, while enjoying a particularly special mojito on a rare night off with my

wife, Jacquelyne, I started singing the lyrics to "Kokomo," ultimately blending the two elements together, "Kokomo...Mojito" – then "Kokomojito." Something about that moment inspired me and I was fixated on the concept of Club Kokomo drawing elements from the song. Kokomojito would eventually become our first ready-to-drink product and would set in motion the creation of what is now one of the most highly awarded rum distilleries in the nation.

I have always been a fan of rum, specifically dark, aged rum. Outside of rum, I'm not much of a liquor drinker per se. If I'm out to eat, I'll typically have a beer, a glass of wine, or my favorite cocktail of choice – the Mojito. The versatility of rum is fascinating. There is so much culture and tradition from all around the world, giving us an opportunity to blend different flavors and distilling traditions with our twist, making CKS Spirits uniquely special.

There are a lot of brands out there that involve sourcing a product that's paired with a label. While this approach can work, I wanted to be involved with the creation of our flavor profiles while controlling how we produced our spirits. Our product lines are the result of a shared team vision to create a premium, additive-free spirits company. We have a 6,000-square-foot distillery in San Diego, California, and a talented management and distilling team that allows us to produce, blend, and distill our award-winning products in-house.

**How do you define Club Kokomo Spirits' mission?**

At Club Kokomo Spirits, we pledge to revolutionize your rum journey. Rum as a spirit category itself is more popular outside





*Club Kokomo rum*

of the U.S., but my family and I strongly feel there is a place in the market for a premium, additive-free, and domestically produced rum product. Much like the tequila boom, we believe rum will have its day. There is just such a great opportunity out there to honor such an amazing spirit. Our mission is to bring something different for rum spirits and canned cocktails to people everywhere. Ultimately, I envision Club Kokomo Spirits as a staple behind bars, in restaurants, and within households across the nation and beyond. This is the goal. We have been in business for about two years and are currently available in three states, California, Arizona, and Nevada. So, we have a ways to go, but fans at home who'd like to try our products can order them online directly to their doorstep in over 35 states.

**Will you provide an overview of Club Kokomo Spirits' products?**

Club Kokomo currently produces a line of three additive-free artisanal rums (Artisanal White, Barrel Finished, and Tahitian Vanilla) and four ready-to-drink canned cocktails.

Our Artisanal White rum has scored a 97-point double gold award at the 2024 San Francisco World Spirits Competition and was designated as the best white rum of the year in 2024 by the Beverage Testing Institute. This award-winning rum contains a unique blend of Demerara cane sugar rum distilled on-site and traditional Jamaican pot still rum. Our Barrel Finished rum scored a 95-point double gold award at the 2024 San Francisco World Spirits Competition and features a proprietary blend of 8- and 10-year-old Jamaican, Barbadian, and Dominican rums. The spirit is aged in new oak, ex-whiskey, and port casks and then

blended in-house and finished in hand-selected high rye bourbon barrels for an additional year. Our Tahitian Vanilla rum is made with fragrantly ripe whole Tahitian vanilla beans that rest with our Artisanal White Rum, slowly imparting their exquisite flavor without added sugars or flavoring. Our proprietary steeping process is closely monitored by our master distiller until the rum is bottled by hand in our facility.

Our ready-to-drink cocktails all clock in a 10 percent ABV and contain all-natural flavors and a blend of both cane sugar and agave as sweeteners. They are balanced in both flavor and carbonation and naturally colored as well – unlike a seltzer, these are true craft cocktails that taste good on the go or are poured over ice in a glass with a garnish. Kokomojito is a lemongrass-infused rum mojito. Afternoon Delight is a rum cocktail with citrus, maple, ginger, and allspice. Mystique is a jasmine tea-infused rum cocktail with lemon, guava, and lychee. Lastly, our only gin variation, Excitation, contains passion fruit, citrus, and black cherry.

**How important has it been to build the Club Kokomo Spirits' team?**

I learned in my high school years, when I was captain of the cross-country team and a member of the track team at Dorsey High School, just how important teamwork is. Because there are no big drinks brand behind us at this time, our team is essential. My wife, Jacquelyne, runs the business as CEO, while my son, Brian, oversees the day-to-day, brand, and product development. Our products are produced, distilled, and blended in-house, so we have partnered with a great distiller and a formulator along with a great San Diego-based operations team. Navigating the industry as an emerging brand has been fun, but not without its challenges. But I find that our partners appreciate the fact that we are a real team, comprised of real people. It is great to see the team working together toward a shared objective with the confidence of excellent product quality behind them. Now that's harmony.

**With all that you have accomplished in your career, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to reflect on your success?**

I personally take time every day not only to reflect, but to meditate as I have been doing daily since December 1967. After having performed at a UNICEF concert in Paris, I, along with several other members of the band and their families, was fortunate to have been taught Transcendental Meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi himself. I believe this practice has given me the fortitude to continue to do what I love to do in music and reflect on every performance as a highlight of my life. I find that our music is so special and millions of people love it. I can't help but remain in a state of gratefulness and appreciation for all the love that we have been given.

A lifetime of harmony in music makes me appreciate the harmony in other things as well. Just as there is harmony in sound, there is harmony in taste, which is why we are so obsessed with making sure our products are delicious and additive-free. The quality of the taste has to be on par with the quality of the sound of our music – it is just so important to us. ●