

Lesley Gore

Lesley Gore was just seventeen when her first record, "**It's My Party**," zoomed to #1 in 1963, and for the next two years her story-songs chronicled the ups and downs of teenage life from the point of view of the "average teenager" (the average white suburban teenager, anyway). Excruciatingly wholesome and rather plain looking in an "average teenager" sort of way, Lesley was a frequent guest on *American Bandstand*, *The Ed Sullivan Show* and other television showcases, and was a favorite of radio stations and concert promoters. Girls and boys alike found her Everyteen songs and "girl next door" image easy to relate to and refreshingly normal. Rather than pine for a dream lover or extol the hidden virtues of a hoodlum, her songs told specific stories that now sound like installments of a quaintly old-fashioned television rerun, with Lesley playing the perky daughter who discovers "That's the Way Boys Are" and declares "I Don't Want to Be a Loser." In real life, the dutiful Lesley stayed in school, working her singing career around her studies at prep school and Sarah Lawrence University. It wasn't a contrived image or act: she really *was* an All-American gal. Fortunately, she had a terrific voice and a keen melodic sense that equaled the era's best for pure, blissful pop.

Gore also had the good fortune of being discovered and produced by **Quincy Jones**. Jones was the A&R man and, a bit later, a vice-president of Mercury Records—the first black man to achieve such a position at a major record company. He made the most of Gore's talents, showcasing her voice in clever, if somewhat formulaic, arrangements that employed state-of-the-art recording techniques such as double-tracked vocals that gave the melodies an extra punch (and inspired the Beatles to do the same). Jones also made sure she had songs that fit her style, audience, musical range and emotional temperament. He and Gore chose "**It's My Party**" for her first release, after sifting through over 250 demotapes looking for a suitable song.

"It's My Party" was Gore's biggest hit, but not her best. The stiff production and lollipop sound of the record are painfully cute. Still, the strong, double-tracked vocals and the 'sticks in your head whether you like it or not' refrain ("It's my party and I'll cry if I want to") made the song a natural hit with her teen and pre-teen audience. The story about Lesley's guy Johnny leaving with that two-faced Judy (at poor Lesley's own party) apparently packed enough of an emotional wallop to warrant a sequel, "Judy's Turn to Cry," where Johnny comes back and Judy gets what she deserves.

Gore finally turned the tables on the guy and capped a string of four consecutive Top Five singles with "**You Don't Own Me**." Often called an "early feminist manifesto," "You Don't Own Me" is certainly a change from the compliant stance of her earlier songs and those of most other "girl" singers and groups. Lesley declares her independence with strong, defiant lyrics—"You don't own me, don't tie me down 'cause I'd never stay"—and a bravado vocal performance that seals the victory. Backed by a dense blend of instruments and echo, a weighty anthem tempo and a dramatic minor key setting that opens triumphantly to major, Gore soars to one powerful climax after another, bending, straining and twisting the melody as if she had indeed been set free.

"You Don't Own Me" peaked at #2 in February, 1964, denied the top spot by "I Want to Hold Your Hand," the opening shot of the British Invasion. Her chart-topping glory days were over, but Gore continued turning out classy, if less feisty, recordings through 1964, including "That's the Way Boys Are" and a pair of Barry & Greenwich

songs, "Maybe I Know" and "Look of Love" (not to be confused with the Bacharach-David song with the same title).

"Look of Love" is a true gem and a fond farewell to the heyday of perfectly crafted pop. Gore's voice—perfectly double-tracked—never sounded purer, and is supported by a thoroughly integrated arrangement highlighted by riffing background voices, an understated brass section and a Spector-ish percussion battery of sleigh bells, timpani and handclaps. The setting of "Look of Love" is a return to the classic theme (Lesley watches her ex-boyfriend with his new girl) from a more real and hurtful stance. Certainly no one could render the song's crushed innocence better than Gore. Within the context of her songs and suburban world, "Look of Love" is as tortured as any blues:

I remember his warm embrace
And the tender look on his face
Yes, look at the way he looks at her now
Isn't that the look of love?