



Singing her own tune

Lesley Gore is on her second run of celebrity—from the “It’s My Party” songbird of the ‘60s to the out singer-songwriter of 2005’s quietly haunting indie CD *Ever Since* By Michael Giltz

Apparently, it was worth the wait. Lesley Gore was a teen sensation, hitting number 1 with her very first single (the thunderous “It’s My Party”) and scoring with other hits like the profeminist anthem “You Don’t Own Me.” She’s also been nominated for an Oscar after cowriting (with her brother Michael) the classic standard “Out Here on My Own” for 1980’s *Fame*.

But Gore hadn’t recorded a new album for 30 years. Now she is out with *Ever Since* (available exclusively at her Web site), and the reviews have been ecstatic. *The New York Times* calls this collection of intimate acoustic pop “mature and wistful,” *The Washington Post* says it is “welcome and enjoyable,” and AllMusic.com deems her CD “subtle and brilliant.”

Gore’s gay fans are just as thrilled to see that her being out—something obvious to those who saw Gore ably serve as a guest host on the TV series *In the Life*—is now acknowledged by the mainstream media.

One of her mentors—Bella Abzug—encouraged her to be more public, and Gore took it to heart, saying yes when the PBS show approached her. (Another clue? The times she would open her act in San Francisco by making a play on an Elton John hit by saying “Don’t let your son go down on me.”) “When I do get to parts of the Midwest, people did come up to me and say, ‘Thanks for doing that [show],’” says the 59-year-old singer-songwriter. “They just want to be validated and know that they’re human beings. So it’s been a nice thing and I’m happy I did it.”

Still, while she’s OK with being public, Gore isn’t ready to be

personal—don’t expect coming-out stories or even how she met her partner, a jewelry designer. Gore is more comfortable talking about “Better Angels”—a track from *Ever Since*—being featured prominently in the season premiere of *CSI: Miami*. “It was utilized beautifully,” she beams. But she’s pleased to acknowledge what she’s been open about with family and friends since the ‘70s.

“We’re talking about this, but I’ve been with the same partner for 24 years,” says Gore. “This is just an opportunity for me to kind of catch up with myself. I’m not campaigning. I’m a musical person, and that’s what I want my life to be about.”

When her stardom was at its highest, even Gore’s Jewishness was off-limits. She didn’t realize she was gay ▶



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until she was ensconced at Sarah Lawrence College, where it was “easier to be Joan Baez than Lesley Gore.”

As time passed, Gore came to believe no label would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to get her back into the studio. But the digital revolution meant that when artist and Engine Company Records founder Blake Morgan approached Gore, she knew they could record an album and even make a few bucks. Of course, it helped that she'd known Morgan (who produced, arranged, and wrote or cowrote several of the songs) since he was 9 years old.

“I remember when Blake sat at the piano and couldn't reach the pedals, which is the problem I still have,” the petite Gore says with a laugh.

The result is easily the best album of her career, with new tunes like the witty “Not the First” (“You're not the first to think you'll be the last”) sitting comfortably alongside more mellow tracks and reimaginings of “You Don't Own Me” and “Out Here on My Own.”

Gore could have been out more prominently in the mid '90s in connection with the movie *Grace of My Heart*, which included a subplot about a Gore-

like teen idol (played by Bridget Fonda) who was gay. Gore worked on the character's song—“My Secret Love”—until she was comfortable having her name on it as a cowriter. But she felt wary that she'd been brought in too late for a real collaboration, and when she wasn't even invited to the premiere, Gore was convinced the filmmakers had used her primarily for publicity. “It turned into the opposite of what I would have wanted,” she says.

So they don't own her either. Now Gore is looking forward to perhaps a live album next year and another album of originals after that. (She says she's already in the midst, or finished with seven or eight songs.) A one-woman show à la Elaine Stritch is a long-held dream, and there might even be a book down the road. But every day—just as it's been for most of her life—the one constant is music.

“When I wake up in the morning and I go to the piano and there's a blank sheet of paper in front of me, by the end of the day that could be a gold mine,” says Gore. “You really do need to wake up and expect that the world is your oyster, because it very well may be.” ■