Library of Congress: As a founding member of the Shirelles, when did you first realize that you, and you singing partners, had something special?

Beverly Lee: Well, we didn’t. We were just teenagers doing what we loved, fooling around in gym class. Then Miss Nolan [our teacher] told us there's a showing coming up at the school and “You should do this show” and we opted to do this show and we didn’t know that we had a classmate whose mother owned a record company. And she was Florence Greenberg. The kids loved us and Mary Jane—Florence’s daughter—just chased us to sign with her mom and finally we were “Okay.” And we [performed] for her and she loved us and offered us a contract. We knew nothing about show business. We were just kids.

LC: Why do you think the four of you worked, blended, so well together?

BL: I think we had a certain energy, a oneness to us. I think God was preparing us for something. And blessing us. And God is still blessing us—making us part of history, the Registry Class of 2022!

LC: “I Met Him on a Sunday” was the first song you recorded. I assume it was also your first time in a recording studio. What was that like?

BL: It was very exciting. You know the first time we heard our first record, “I Met Him on a Sunday,” was when they played it over the intercom of our school. So we heard it with all our classmates. They loved it!

LC: When you first heard “Sunday,” before you recorded it, did you know it would be a success?
BL: We didn’t have a clue. But we thought teenagers would like it since it was about teenagers doing about what teenagers do and we knew kids would like the lyrics. And we enjoyed doing it. You know, our music has taken us to five continents.

LC: How quickly after the recording sessions did you start to tour and perform?

BL: Within a year we were. When I was little, my mother aunt and took me to the Apollo. Whoever knew that I would, one day, be honored in such a way to actually perform there! And the Shirelles would go on to play the Apollo 20 times!

LC: Since when you recorded “Tonight’s The Night,” the LP, you were so new and so young, I doubt you got to have too much input into the songs you got to record for the album. Am I right?

BL: We didn’t have any say. Our AR man, Luther Dixon, had an ear for music and he was good for us and he picked the songs. We had some input on the backgrounds. Eventually, we got to write our own music and we were one of the first [to do so] in the male-dominated music business. We had our own publishing and were the first girl group to sell over one million records.

LC: Of all the amazing songs on the “Tonight’s the Night” album, do you have a favorite?

BL: “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow” and “Dedicated to the One I Love.” “Will You Still Love Me” is our national anthem! When we played colleges, the boys would always sing along—the high parts! I just wrote a book called “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow” and I’m looking for a publisher….

When we first heard “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow,” the Carole King/Gerry Goffin song, we didn’t like it. It had a country/western sound on the demo but Luther was like, “Oh, you are going to record this one.” So he worked up a new lush arrangement with strings, harps…you name it. You know, Carole might have done that arrangement...

But Carole didn’t like the percussion on the song so she took over. That’s her playing the percussion on the recording. So we consider it our Girl Power song, our women’s rights song.

LC: Was there a moment that you and the other Shirelles knew you had “made it”?

BL: No. We never changed, we still did the things we always did. We’d see people around town, around New York, at the Brill Building and on Broadway and they’d tell us, “Girls, you did it again! You’re #1 with a bullet!” It really didn’t mean anything to us. We were greener than green!

LC: Why do you think “Will You Still…” and so many other songs from this collection have endured so much?

BL: They told a story. People have told us that they have charted their lives by our songs. The songs have brought people together. It’s love, healing and hope. You know the street our high school is on has been named after us—Shirelles Blvd. and the school auditorium, too. So, I guess, this is what God meant for us to do.

On behalf of myself and Shirley I would to thank the Library of Congress for giving us flowers while we’re still alive.