

## Billie Jean (1982)

Michael Jackson

### LISTEN FOR

- Distinctive drum/bass guitar/synth groove (timbre, harmony, rhythm)
- Slick pop production (use of stereo field, overdubs, etc.)
- Gradually thickening arrangement
- Simple verse-chorus (with contrasting pre-chorus)
- Curious lyrics about denying paternity

### CREATION

---

*Songwriters* Michael Jackson

*Album* *Thriller*

*Label* Epic ES-823

*Musicians* Michael Jackson (songwriting, composition, vocals arrangement, rhythm arrangement, lead vocals, background vocals), Leon Ndugu Chanler (drums), Louis Johnson (bass guitar), David Williams (guitar), Michael Boddicker (emulator), Greg Smith (synthesizer), Bill Wolfer (synthesizer)

*Producer* Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones

*Engineer* Bruce Swedien

*Recording* 1982

*Charts* Pop 1, Black 1

---

### MUSIC

---

*Genre* Dance-pop

*Form* Simple verse-chorus (with contrasting pre-chorus)

*Key* F-sharp minor

*Meter* 4/4

---

## LISTENING GUIDE

Time	Form	Lyric Cue	Listen For
0:00	Intro (14)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bass and drums set up the song's groove.</li> <li>Percussive vocalization echoes across stereo field.</li> </ul>
0:20			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Synthesizer enters with repeating, 4-chord pattern.</li> </ul>
0:28	Verse 1 (12)	"She was more like"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead vocal enters with heavy reverb. Jackson's voice overdubbed an octave higher at the ends of phrases.</li> </ul>
0:53	Verse 2 (12)	"She told me her name"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As before.</li> </ul>
1:10	Pre-chorus (8)	"People always told me"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contrasting musical material, as arrangement builds through the addition of new synth trumpet melody, electric piano, and splash cymbal.</li> </ul>
1:26	Chorus (12)	"Billie Jean is not my lover"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Verse's music returns, but with text's chorus (= simple verse-chorus).</li> <li>Harmony vocals enters with synth strings.</li> <li>Vocal octaves and rhythmic octaves in guitars at ends of phrases.</li> <li>Melodic "spaces" filled with stereophonic vocalizations.</li> </ul>
1:50	Verse 3 (12)	"For forty days"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As before, with added string melody in the synthesizer part and more activity between voice parts.</li> </ul>
2:15	Verse 4 (12)	"She told my baby"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As verse 3.</li> </ul>
2:32	Pre-chorus (8)	"People always told me"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds as before, but now with new synth string melody.</li> </ul>
2:48	Chorus (12)	"Billie Jean is not my lover"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As before, but now with new, descending synth string melody at end of phrase.</li> </ul>
3:05	Chorus (12)	"Billie Jean is not my lover"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funk guitar line and synth trumpet line are added.</li> </ul>
3:28	Interlude (12)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rhythmic guitar line highlighted, with vocals at end.</li> </ul>
3:54	Chorus (12)	"Billie Jean is not my lover"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As before, but with guitar line mixed forward and more vocal interjections.</li> </ul>
4:18	Coda (16)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Various improvised singing along with harmony vocals as song fades out.</li> </ul>

## LYRICS

She was more like a beauty queen from a  
movie scene  
I said don't mind, but what do you mean, I  
am the one  
Who will dance on the floor in the round  
She said I am the one, who will dance on the  
floor in the round

She told me her name was Billie Jean, as she  
caused a scene  
Then every head turned with eyes that  
dreamed of being the one  
Who will dance on the floor in the round

People always told me be careful of what  
you do  
And don't go around breaking young girls'  
hearts  
And mother always told me be careful of  
who you love  
And be careful of what you do 'cause the lie  
becomes the truth

Billie Jean is not my lover  
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one  
But the kid is not my son  
She says I am the one, but the kid is not my  
son

For forty days and forty nights  
The law was on her side  
But who can stand when she's in demand  
Her schemes and plans  
'Cause we danced on the floor in the round  
So take my strong advice, just remember to  
always think twice  
(Don't think twice, don't think twice)

She told my baby we'd danced till three,  
then she looked at me  
Then showed a photo my baby cried his  
eyes were like mine (oh, no!)

'Cause we danced on the floor in the round,  
baby

People always told me be careful of what  
you do  
And don't go around breaking young girls'  
hearts

She came and stood right by me  
Just the smell of sweet perfume  
This happened much too soon  
She called me to her room

Billie Jean is not my lover  
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one  
But the kid is not my son

Billie Jean is not my lover  
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one  
But the kid is not my son  
She says I am the one, but the kid is not my  
son

She says I am the one, but the kid is not my  
son

Billie Jean is not my lover  
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one  
But the kid is not my son  
She says I am the one, but the kid is not my  
son

She says I am the one,  
(you know what you did, (she says he is my  
son)breaking my heart babe)  
She says I am the one

Billie Jean is not my lover  
Billie Jean is not my lover  
Billie Jean is not my lover  
Billie Jean is not my lover (don't Billie Jean)  
Billie Jean is not my lover  
Billie Jean is not my lover

## SOURCES

- Katherine Charlton, *Rock Music Styles: A History*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2011), 281–82.
- John Covach and Andrew Flory, *What's That Sound*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 410–11.