



ella at duke's place

Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington

	Time
1. Something to Live For (Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington–William Thomas "Billy" Strayhorn)	3:35
2. A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing (aka "Passion") (Billy Strayhorn)	5:00
3. Passion Flower (Billy Strayhorn)	4:39
4. I Like the Sunrise (Duke Ellington)	3:26
5. Azure (Duke Ellington–Irving Mills)	6:48
6. Imagine My Frustration (Duke Ellington–Billy Strayhorn–Gerald Stanley Wilson)	4:49
7. Duke's Place (aka "C-Jam Blues") (Duke Ellington–Bill Katz–Ruth Roberts–Robert Thiele)	4:13
8. Brown-skin Gal (in the Calico Gown) (Duke Ellington–Paul Francis Webster)	5:05
9. What Am I Here For? (Duke Ellington–Frank Paul Lovecchio aka "Frankie Laine")	5:35
10. Cotton Tail (Duke Ellington)	3:41

Ella Fitzgerald sings on all tracks, accompanied by:

Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: Cat Anderson, Herbie Jones, Cootie Williams (t); Lawrence Brown, Chuck Connors, Robert Cooper (tb); Jimmy Hamilton (cl, ts); Johnny Hodges, Russell Procope (as); Paul Gonsalves (ts); Harry Carney (bs); Jimmy Jones (p); John Lamb (b); Sam Woodyard (d); Ellington (arr, cond).

Tracks 1–4: Jones (arr) replaces Ellington.

Tracks 5–7, 9, and 10: Ellington (p) replaces Jones.

Track 6: Gerald Wilson (arr) replaces Ellington.

Recorded October 18, 19, and 20, 1965 at United Recorders, Hollywood

Original LP issue: *Ella at Duke's Place* Verve V6-4070

Original recordings produced by **Norman Granz**

Cover photograph by **Jay Thompson**



Reissuing ELLA AT DUKE'S PLACE

■ Considering the magnitude of their collective achievement the first time Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington's men came together in 1957, it is a little surprising that their 1965 rematch, a single-LP affair, was generally perceived at the time as just another good record. This is reflected in the fact that in 1966, the year of its initial release, it came in 27th in the *down beat* annual readers' poll, receiving just thirty-eight votes (the Beatles' *Revolver* was no. 28, with just one vote fewer). This in the year Ellington won in the Big Band category by polling more than twice as many votes as Count Basie, who was no. 2, and in the Composer category by four times as many votes as the runner-up there, Thelonious Monk. Fitzgerald, of course, won the Female Vocal vote comfortably over Nancy Wilson and Carmen McRae, with Nina Simone a distant fourth.

Was the record deserving of such a fate? From the evidence of surviving Ellington band members and from a look at both Fitzgerald's and Ellington's itineraries at this time, certainly a great deal of effort was expended by all concerned to make this a special date. One might have expected this from producer Norman Granz, by this time no longer running Verve but still involved in all aspects of Fitzgerald's professional life, but not from Ellington, who was well known for leaving everything until the last minute.

A glance at the track list shows just two pieces, "Azure" and "Cotton Tail", shared with the Ellington-Fitzgerald songbook sessions, and both of these songs were done then with small groups, one featuring Ben Webster and the other a tender duet with Barney Kessel. So the selections and arrangements here were new in this combination.

The regular Ellington bassist at this time, John Lamb, resorts to his diary to get the precise order of events, discovering that, in fact, although Fitzgerald and Ellington's band did embark on a string of concerts around California in October 1965, these sessions came first. "Duke and [Billy] Strayhorn moved into the Rodeo Hotel in Beverly Hills for a week, October 15 to 22, and while we continued to gig in the evenings, there were three days of joint recording with Ella during the afternoons at United Recorders."

A gig in Lewistown, Idaho for the twentieth was actually canceled, no doubt so that the album could be properly finished. It was only after this time that Fitzgerald started appearing with the band, singing much the same selection of songs as she'd just recorded: Indeed, *Variety* went to print soon afterwards to say that *Ella at Duke's Place* was culled from tapes of a California concert on the twenty-third. Lamb refutes this: "That is definitely not so, because there was more than one take of many of the numbers."¹ The other refutation comes from the recollections of Ellington trombonist Buster Cooper:

"I remember the sessions well; they were better than the rehearsals for pulling the material together. [But] Duke knew what he wanted before we went into the studio. Room was made for Ella. On *Duke's Place*, I had a solo taken out and given over to Ella, because the song became too long for us both to fit in; I remember *that* all right!"

Cooper also clearly recalls the atmosphere of the session — a friendly industriousness.

"Ella idolized Duke and Strayhorn as human beings and for their creativity. She would just listen to everything they'd say. We ran down the charts once and she caught them. She has the greatest ear in the world. And great rhythm, plus perfect intonation. Duke did most of the piano playing. It was a collaboration; he would always be checking, 'Oh, now — how do you feel? Is it comfortable for you?' He would always go in the direction of his artists, and he respected her ability so much. It was a typical Ellington session; the man was a genius!"

Lamb recalls,

"We'd done the majority of the pieces before, but new charts were prepared [for the date]. Ella went along with the selections which had been decided upon. Strayhorn brought in some slow things which were new. They were trying to get takes all the way through, with a lot of care given to the overall sound. Ella was mostly in the sound booth and we were in the open area."

What neither man remembers is that pianist Jimmy Jones both played on and arranged four numbers for this session, two of Strayhorn's (*Passion Flower* and *A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing*), one of Ellington's (*I Like the Sunrise*), and one of their collaborations (*Something to Live For*). These were the first recorded, and all four tracks were on side one of the original LP release, dubbed in the liner notes (no doubt by Ellington) "The pretty, the lovely, the tender, the hold-me-close side". (Side two was called "The finger-snapping, head-shaking,

¹Unissued takes of several selections are known to circulate among collectors, but suitable sound sources for them have not been located.

toe-tapping, go-for-yourself side"). Jones's comment on his own involvement was, "It's like going to school, being around this band."

This was not simply a case of getting someone to cover for Ellington at the last minute, because not only was the bandleader overseeing every aspect of the performances, personally directing Fitzgerald's individual obbligatists for just the shades he wanted, but each of the four Jones arrangements has a fully integrated and thought-through chart. The charts are superbly played by the band and astonishingly well sung by Fitzgerald, who at times reaches a level of emotionality (the two "Flower" pieces are redolent with what can only be termed erotic longing) rarely if ever associated with her. The continuity of style among all three arrangers employed is such that the fifth title on the first side, *Azure*, whose melody was initially written and is newly scored by Ellington alone, is completely of a piece with the first four.

Side two is not so homogeneous, and at times on the up-tempo selections such as "Duke's Place" and *Cotton Tail* there is an uncharacteristically awkward straining for effect from Fitzgerald. In fact "Cotton Tail", the album's closer, finds the band unable to settle into a smooth delivery of its section work due to an improbably fast rhythm from the bass and drums. *Brown-skin Gal (in the Calico Gown)*, originally heard in Ellington's 1941 musical *Jump for Joy*, sails along majestically for half of its length, only for the tempo to be doubled and the effect dissipated. In short, on the finger-snapping side, when it came to rethinks, Ellington won some and lost some.

Asked whether Norman Granz ever attempted to involve himself in such musical matters, Cooper is in no doubt: All Granz's work was done prior to the recording session.

"Definitely. Granz was a professional in his approach. He would never interfere in the musical process. He was naturally very tight with Ella, being her manager, and he was tight with Duke at that time. Sure — [Granz and Duke] had their arguments. I was there and I heard them. But the music came first. Granz wasn't a musician — didn't know what a C-chord was — and that's why he kept right out of the music. He had too much respect for Duke and Strayhorn to do anything else."

Perhaps, finally, everyone simply had too much fun to worry overly about the rushed tempos or the slight vocal strain here and there. Lamb remembers, "Ella kidded and joked around; she

was so easy to work with. Duke and Strayhorn had been with her before, and these were very happy sessions. At the time we were doing so much recording that we didn't much think about it." But one event that occurred immediately after the album was completed sticks in Lamb's mind very clearly.

"After the recording, we all went over to Ella's house in Beverly Hills, at her invitation. We had a big session — that's what I really remember! Ella had all this wonderful food laid on, and it was a beautiful party. Duke and Strayhorn were there, and so was Granz — we all had a great time. It was a beautiful thing for Ella to do."

As, in retrospect, was the album *Ella at Duke's Place*.

Keith Shadwick
November 1995

REISSUE

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This is a facsimile of the original LP back cover.



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Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington

File under: *Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald*

From the evidence of surviving band members and from a look at both Ella Fitzgerald's and Duke Ellington's itineraries at this time, certainly a great deal of effort was expended by all to make this 1965 date (a rematch of the principals' legendary 1957 songbook sessions) special in all regards. Ellington trombonist Buster Cooper remembers, "Ella idolized Duke and [Billy] Strayhorn . . . She would just listen to everything they'd say. . . . It was a collaboration; [Duke] would always be checking, 'Oh, now — how do you feel? Is it comfortable for you?'"

The charts are superbly played and astonishingly well sung by Fitzgerald, who at times reaches a level of emotionality rarely if ever associated with her. The continuity of style in everyone's playing, in fact, on all of the charts (contributed variously by Ellington, Strayhorn, and the underrated Jimmy Jones) makes the session a masterpiece. And one lovely reunion.

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