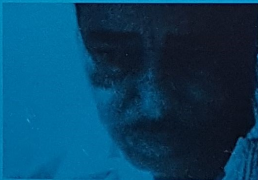


ELLA FITZGERALD *sings the* DUKE ELLINGTON *song book*

The virtues inherent in any great musical performance are several and interdependent. Sincerity without talent is not enough; talent without technique will never do; technique without spontaneity is a firm but empty shell. When all the essential qualities can be found in one singer, when the same characteristics are common to one composer, and the singer embarks on a project involving the interpretation of this composer's most inspired works, every link has been forged in an impermeably solid chain. Just such an ideal combination of circumstances can be found in *Ella Fitzgerald Sings Duke Ellington*.

Has it ever occurred to you to wonder why you are an Ella Fitzgerald fan? Why almost every singer in popular music today names her at the top of every list of favorites? The answer is simple in some respects, complex in others. Obviously Ella sings with impeccable intonation; clearly she has a highly intuitive sense of rhythm, a tender feeling for every ballad, an original approach to every rhythm song, an instrumentalist's feeling for improvisation when the material calls for it. Yet there are other singers who have these character-



I YOU • DAY DREAM • TAKE THE A TRAIN • EVERYTH
W • BLI BLIP • I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD
YST IN MEDITATION • ALL TOO SOON • AZURE • LOST
N • I'M JUST A LUCKY SO AND SO • LUSH LIFE • PE
GLEMENTINE • COTTON TAIL • JUST SQUEEZE ME (B
AT SWING) • IT DON'T MEAN A THING (IF IT AIN'T G
BRIDGE • I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT • CHELS
I A SENTIMENTAL MOOD • SATIN DOLL • IN A SENTI
CKIN' IN RHYTHM • I AIN'T GOT NOthin' BUT THE
ET AROUND MUCH ANY MORE • DON'T GET AROUND
ED LADY • PRELUDE TO A KISS • JUST A SITTIN' ANI
BED • I LET A SONG GO OUT OF MY HEART • ROCK
DO NOthin' TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME • I DIDN'T KN

istics; but they have never succeeded in matching Ella's hold on the audience, her breadth of appeal to fans of every shade of taste. The sound-quality of Ella's voice, technically analyzed, is not extraordinary. No, there is more to it than the self-evident advantages of good vocal equipment. Part of the answer probably lies in the fact that while such singers as Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday often have been described as "imitatable," the fact is that they are exactly the reverse. Their vocal personalities are so stylized, so intensely personal in timbre, that scores of singers have attempted, sometimes with a fair degree of success, to imitate them through the years. Yet how often can you remember having heard a singer trying to give an imitation of Ella Fitzgerald?

Yes, this must indeed be one of the reasons for the Fitzgerald legend. Ella is among the few who truly live up to this fired and misapplied adjective. She is at once the unique and the universal, the tangible and the intangible. Louis and Billie and Sarah have their own great styles, but Ella sings as the average singer wishes she could sing; she is the sublimation of the perfected norm toward which a thousand contemporaries strive.

These things have been true of Ella Fitzgerald almost from the beginning. Only fourteen when she left her home in Yonkers, N. Y., to take part in her first amateur show, only sixteen when she joined the orchestra of the late Chick Webb, she betrayed on her very first record, in the summer of 1935, most of the happy, innocuous yet confident air that permeates a typical Fitzgerald performance today. The stone has been polished and given a more luxuriant setting, but essentially it catches the sunlight in exactly the same manner.

What holds good for Ella Fitzgerald in vocal terms is no less true of Edward Kennedy Ellington on the level of composition. Nothing and nobody, no matter how loud the fanfare or how fickle the fans, can replace or surpass the position he holds as the greatest figure in the fifty-year dynasty of jazz and as the most versatile and resourceful ASCAP member ever to put pen to manuscript paper.

Although Ellington began composing some forty years ago when, as a teenager playing in a Washington resort

known as the Poodle Dog Cafe, he devised something known as the *Soda Fountain Rag*, it would be more accurate to place the start of his seriously creative career when, late in 1923, he took a small band into a smoky, bathtub-gin-redolent basement club called the Hollywood Cafe, on Broadway at 49th Street in Manhattan. During their long stay at that establishment the Washingtonians, as they were called then, made their first phonograph records and their first broadcasts. As early as 1924 Duke wrote the score of a show; it was called *The Chocolate Kiddies* and without ever getting to Broadway it managed to run for two years in Berlin. By 1927, when he made his big-time bow at the world-famed Cotton Club in Harlem, Duke was well on his way as the composer and orchestrator of dozens of original works. Almost all these early efforts remained within the realm of the strictly instrumental; it was not until the early 1930s that lyrics were added to a few of the most singable works.

By 1934 Ellington was an international phenomenon. *Mood Indigo* and a few other early compositions had established him not merely with jazz fans, but among audiences on five continents who were susceptible to an original and easily remembered melody. The Ellington orchestra had made its first triumphant tour in Europe. The Ellington career during the next decade went forward and upward on several levels. More and more of the music that had originated within the Ellington ranks found outlets among other singers and orchestras in the areas of both jazz and popular music. Ellington began to collaborate with a series of distinguished lyricists; by the early 1940s some of his songs even reached that summit of popularity indicated by representation on the Hit Parade. Simultaneously the Ellington orchestra began a series of annual concerts at Carnegie Hall at which Duke introduced a cycle of extended form works. The band took part in a couple of stage productions for which Duke had written the scores. In 1948 and again two years later Ellington returned to many of the scenes of his pre-war European triumphs.

Today the Ellington name is secure not merely for the success of the moment or even of the year or decade; it is

established for this century of modern music, and for centuries to come. More than any other figure in his chosen field, the Duke has assured himself, through his contributions during the past three decades, of a place in posterity such as only a talent of his caliber can guarantee.

One of the more remarkable aspects of Ellington's accomplishments lies in the more or less accidental nature of the acceptance of many of his works by other performers. It has been said, with truth, that the instrument Ellington plays best is his orchestra, and most of his works have been written with his own instrumental soloists and his own ensembles in mind; yet time and again his works have transcended what might seem to have been the limitation of this special objective and have been taken up spontaneously by other singers, other bands. There is a seeming paradox, too, in the acceptance of so many of his works by the general public, which generally demands a degree of simplicity in anything the man on the street expects to be able to hum. Ellington the orchestrator-bandleader has been responsible for some of the most complex and ingenious arrangements, some of the most melodically tricky themes, in contemporary music; yet time and again he has demonstrated the flexibility of his pen by providing innumerable melodic gems that are simple, unpretentious and supremely adaptable to the performance of others.

There are two records contained in this volume, one with the Ellington big band backing Ella, and the other record with a small group consisting of Paul Smith, Ben Webster, Stuff Smith, Alvin Stoller, and Barney Kessel.

The first tune in the big band set is *Rockin' In Rhythm*, co-written by baritone saxophonist Harry Carney (now in his 31st year as member of the Ellington band) and first recorded in 1930.

Drop Me Off In Harlem was written by Duke with a most improbable pair of collaborators—Nick and Charles Kenny, of *Love Letters In The Sand* fame. If this is an unfamiliar item to many of the younger Fitzgerald or Ellington fans, it could well be because little has been heard of it since the Ellington band first recorded it, in 1933. Solos are by Nance and Terry.

In approaching *Day Dream* the listener may accept this simply for what it is—a lovely, melodically simple theme written by Billy Strayhorn, Duke's perennial collaborator—or for what it was when it first reached the public ear—a vehicle for the grandiloquent tones of Johnny Hodges' alto saxophone, in a record made by Johnny with a small contingent out of the Ellington orchestra in 1940. From the Ravel-like introduction through Ella's vocal to the passage in which Hodges himself takes over the spotlight, this is the kind of lush and luminous day dream that could stem from no other source than the Ellington musical menage.

Caravan, written in 1936, was developed and orchestrated by Duke from a theme by the trombonist, Juan Tizol. Despite two decades of constant use for every

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ELLA FITZGERALD SINGS
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SONG BOOK - Vol. 1

Album 2615 032



FACE A
Disque 1

G.U.



N° 2367 184

1. ROCKIN' IN RYTHM (Carney - Ellington - Mills)
2. DROP ME OFF IN HARLEM (Ellington - Kenny)
3. DAY DREAM (Latouche - Ellington - Strayhorn)
4. CARAVAN (Ellington - Mills - Tizol)
5. TAKE THE "A" TRAIN (Strayhorn)

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FACE B
Disque 1

G.U.



N° 2367 184

1. I AIN'T GOT NOTHING BUT THE BLUES
(Ellington - George)
2. CLEMENTINE (Strayhorn)
3. I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOU
(Ellington - Russell)
4. I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT
(George - Hodges - James - Ellington)
5. LOST IN MEDITATION (Singer -
Tizol - Ellington - Mills)
6. PERDIDO (Tizol -
Longsfelder - Drake)

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FACE A
Disque 2



N° 2367 185

1. COTTONTAIL (Ellington)
2. DO NOTHING TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME
(Ellington - Russell)
3. JUST A SITTING AND A ROCKIN'
(Strayhorn - Ellington - Galnes)
4. SOLITUDE (De Lange - Ellington - Mills)
5. ROCKS IN MY BED (Ellington)

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G.U.



FACE B
Disque 2

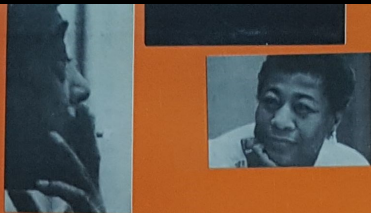


N° 2367 185

1. SATIN DOLL (Ellington)
2. SOPHISTICATED LADY (Ellington - Parish - Mills)
3. JUST SQUEEZE ME (But don't tease me)
(Galnes Ellington)
4. IT DON'T MEAN A THING (If it ain't got
that swing) (Ellington - Mills)
5. AZURE (Ellington - Mills)

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exotic background effect and every small night club and burlesque act, *Caravan* has survived a myriad of man-handlings to remain one of the most appealing of Tizol's several Middle-East-tinged works.

Take *The "A" Train*, named for a subway ride on the Eighth Avenue line that makes no stops between Columbus Circle and 125th Street, gets an appropriate express-train workout as the Ellington band takes off with a novel programmatic introduction. After Billy Strayhorn wrote this for an Ellington session in 1941 it became so resounding a hit that the band has used it as a signature tune ever since. Ella bops it as well as using the lyrics; another highlight is a series of four-measure solos by the galaxy of trumpeters heard in the band in this order: Clark Terry, Harold Baker, Willie Cook, Cat Anderson, Dizzy Gillespie who sat in with the band when this side was recorded, and Ray Nance. Dizzy, enthused at the prospect of Ella recording with Ellington came to the session as a spectator and wound up being drafted by the trumpet section to play with them.

I Ain't Got Nothing But the Blues, which opens side two, typifies the superb Ellington ability to compromise effectively between the theme written in terms of his musicians' performances and the popular song conceived along purely vocal lines. Written in 1944 with lyrics by Don George, a frequent Ellington collaborator at that time, it is at once a ballad and a blues, expressing in slightly altered phrases the ageless mood of which the blues is capable, and which Ella has always interpreted with such magnificent assurance and conviction.

Clementine, probably one of the least known of all, was composed by Billy Strayhorn and recorded on an Ellington band date in 1941. This version teams Ella with the band in what is virtually a modernized, vocalized treatment of the original orchestration.

I Didn't Know About You similarly evolved from instrumental origin to vocal popularity. Duke recorded it as a feature framework for Johnny Hodges' saxophone in July 1942, when it was known as *Sentimental Lady*. It earned a slightly changed melody and a new title in its new guise after Duke held a conclave with Bob Russell, a sensitive lyricist whose hits include *Brazil*, *Ballerina*, *Frenesi*, *Maria Elena* and *Tahoo*.

I'm Beginning to See the Light has a history similar to that of *In a Mellotone*, having originated informally within the Ellington ranks. Johnny Hodges played the

riff, Ellington elaborated on it and soon Don George was called in to add lyrics. All this happened in 1944. Ella recorded the tune previously, some years ago, but was hampered by the company of a vocal group; in sharp contrast, in this version she is enhanced by the presence of the Ellington band.

Loti in Meditation was first recorded in 1938, under the title of *Have A Heart* by trumpeter Cootie Williams with a contingent from the Ellington band. Juan Tizol, Duke's collaborator on the tune, took part in the original recording. The melody, gliding gently in long notes, seemed to lend itself to lyrical adaptation. Not long after the original release Lou Singer, former child prodigy of the piano and a Juilliard graduate, who was then working as an arranger in the office of Ellington's manager, wrote the words.

Perdido, though, indivisibly associated with the Ellington name, was composed by Juan Tizol, the Puerto-Rico-born valve trombonist who played in the band off and on from 1929 to 1953. In this Fitzgerald version with Duke and the band, there are portions of the original arrangement, combined with both lyrical and bop-vocal treatment by Ella. Heard from individually are: Harold Baker, Jimmy Hamilton, Clark Terry and Sam Woodyard.

Cotton Tail typifies one of the brightest and lightest aspects of the Ellington talent—the fast melody, played in unison by the band, usually as a prelude to the unleashing of a string of instrumental solos. For this version Ella becomes, as it were, one of the soloists, urging Ben Webster into his solo (Ben was an important part of the original Ellington band version in 1940) and trading phrases with him in the last chorus.

Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me, a somewhat reconstructed version of a 1940 instrumental known as *Concerto for Cootie* (for Duke's trumpet soloist Cootie Williams).

Next, *Just A-Sittin' And A-Rockin'*, which Ellington and his partner Billy Strayhorn wrote in 1941.

Solitude, Duke's first hit song, was originally recorded by him in January 1934 and later equipped with lyrics by the late Eddie De Lange, co-leader of the celebrated Hudson-De Lange band of the 1930s.

Rocks in My Bed furnishes a reminder of Ellington's perennially-retained ties with the roots of jazz. Every once in awhile he pens a tune that is based on the traditional twelve-measure blues form. Composed in 1940, it illustrates admirably the origin of Ellington's approach, even to this overworked thematic base; it has a distinctive melody and a witty set of lyrics written by Duke himself.

Satin Doll, most recent of the Ellington items in this set, was first played by the Ellington band in 1953. Though Ella resorts to lyrics briefly, it is her humming of the easily-swinging melody that gives this performance most of its charm.

Sophisticated Lady was a collaboration, in February 1933, between Ellington and Otto "Toby" Hardwicke, an alto saxophonist who played it in a gliding, legato style that helped to make this one of Duke's first popular song hits. Lyrics were later added by Mitchell Parish of *Stardust* fame. Ella's soulful rendition is spelled by a chorus divided between Stuff Smith and Ben Webster.

Just Squeeze Me, But Don't Tease Me, like so many Ellington works, grew almost spontaneously from a modest start as an instrumental number to a national vogue as a words-and-music favorite. Rex Stewart, the cornetist with Duke in the 1930s and early '40s, led a small Ellington unit that recorded it in Hollywood in 1941 under the title *Subtle Slough*; the lyrics came five years later.

It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing), was first recorded by Ellington in 1932. Its title has served as a watchword and warning to a quarter-century of soloists and singers. In this bright-tempoed treatment it earns a double-edged approach by Ella, who uses the lyrics as well as wordlessly bopping her own fanciful feelings; in addition there are four full instrumental choruses.

Azure is an extraordinarily basic yet harmonically and melodically alluring work published in 1937 and never previously recorded with lyrics.

Whether you are reading these notes before your first hearing of these records, or during or after it, it is unlikely that you will take issue with my premise that the alliance of Ella Fitzgerald with the music of Duke Ellington has brought about the most eventful and imaginative flight since Wilbur Wright first took off from Kitty Hawk with Orville.

Text by LEONARD FEATHER
(Author of *The Book of Jazz* and *The Encyclopedia of Jazz*)

Postscript: As you can tell by the title of this album, it's Volume 1, or more accurately, the first half of the "Duke Ellington Song Book." Ella and Duke continue their story telling in Volume 2, in which Duke also plays an original suite dedicated to Ella called "Portrait of Ella Fitzgerald." The suite contains four movements, each describing a facet of Ella's musical personality. For the complete story, then, you might listen to Volume 2.

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