

"The First Lady of Song," Ella Fitzgerald was arguably the finest female jazz singer of all time (although some may vote for Sarah Vaughan or Billie Holiday). Blessed with a beautiful voice and a wide range, Fitzgerald could outswing anyone, was a brilliant scat singer, and had near-perfect elocution; one could always understand the words she sang. The one fault was that, since she always sounded so happy to be singing, Fitzgerald did not always dig below the surface of the lyrics she interpreted and she even made a downbeat song such as "Love for Sale" sound joyous. However, when one evaluates her career on a whole, there is simply no one else in her class.



ELLA
FITZGERALD
SINGS THE
GEORGE
AND IRA
GERSHWIN
SONGBOOK
WITH
NELSON RIDDLE

In a career tragically cut short in mid-stride by a brain tumor, George Gershwin (1898-1937) proved himself to be not only one of the great songwriters of his extremely rich era, but also a gifted "serious" composer who bridged the worlds of classical and popular music. The latter is all the more striking, given that, of his contemporaries, Gershwin was the most influenced by such styles as jazz and blues.

Gershwin's first major hit, interpolated into the show *Sinbad* in 1919, was "Swanee," sung by Al Jolson. Gershwin wrote both complete scores and songs for such variety shows as *George White's Scandals* (whose annual editions thus were able to introduce such songs as "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" and "Somebody Loves Me").

After 1924, Gershwin worked primarily with his brother Ira as his lyricist. The two scored a series of Broadway hits in the '20s and early '30s, starting with *Lady Be Good* (1924), which included the song "Fascinatin' Rhythm." 1924 was also the year Gershwin composed his first classical piece, "Rhapsody in Blue," and he would continue to work in the classical field until his death.

By the '30s, the Gershwins had turned to political topics and satire in response to the onset of the Depression, and their *Of Thee I Sing* became the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize. In the mid '30s, Gershwin ambitiously worked to meld his show music and classical leanings in the creation of the folk opera *Porgy and Bess*, with lyrics by Ira and Dubose Heyward. The Gershwins had moved to Hollywood and were engaged in several movie projects at the time of George Gershwin's death.

Born in New York, he was the elder of Ira and George Gershwin. Ira Gershwin developed a talent for writing and drawing in high school where he wrote a column in the school newspaper. After graduation he attended the City College of New York but dropped out to pursue a career in writing. In 1917 he sold his first magazine article. It was also in 1917 that a career involving singing and writing developed. Ira Gershwin became a reviewer for vaudeville shows. In 1918 the famous collaboration of George

and Ira Gershwin began.

Because his younger brother George Gershwin had already made a name for himself on Broadway, Ira Gershwin took the pseudonym Arthur Francis. His first Broadway hit was in 1921 with *Two Little Girls In Blue*, a musical he produced with Vincent Youmans. In 1924, Ira Gershwin experienced a plethora of Broadway success and dropped the pseudonym.

Together Ira and George Gershwin wrote several hits for Broadway musicals including "The Man I Love," "S Wonderful" and "Of Thee I Sing." During their career together Ira Gershwin was content on George always being in the limelight. They wrote several musical scores including *Porgy and Bess*, *An American in Paris*, *The Country Girl* and *The North Star*.

When George Gershwin died in 1937, Ira Gershwin retired from songwriting. In 1941, Ira Gershwin began writing again. He worked with composer Kurt Weill in 1941 to produce *Lady in the Dark*. He also worked with Jerome Kern and Harold Arlen. In 1959 he released an album of his work, *Lyrics on Several Occasions*. Ira Gershwin finally retired in 1960 after more than three decades of songwriting.

Ira Gershwin's musical genius did not go unnoticed. He received three Oscar nominations; in 1938 for Best Music, Song, "They Can't Take That Away From Me," from the musical *Shall We Dance?*; in 1945 for Best Music, Song "Long Ago and Far Away" from the musical *Cover Girl* and in 1955 for Best Music, Song "The Man That Got Away" from the musical *A Star Is Born*. His lyrics and songwriting made him famous despite his allowance to let his brother George Gershwin always take the spotlight. Ira Gershwin's contributions to the success of those Broadway musicals remains seen by many. He died in Beverly Hills in 1983. As a tribute to his musical genius and accomplishments Ira Gershwin received a star on the Walk of Fame, June 4, 1998.

Ella Fitzgerald sings Gershwin

- 1 A Foggy Day 3:33
 - 2 Clap Yo' Hands 2:31
 - 3 For You, For Me, For Evermore 3:25
 - 4 Stiff Upper Lip 2:53
 - 5 Boy Wanted 3:35
 - 6 Strike Up The Band 2:38
 - 7 Soon 2:23
 - 8 I've Got A Crush On You 3:30
 - 9 Bidin' My Time 2:42
 - 10 Aren't You Kind Of Glad We Did? 3:30
 - 11 Of Thee I Sing (Baby) 3:11
- Total Time: 33:51

Producer: Norman Granz
Recorded 1959 by Verve Records