

Nelson Riddle: 1921-1985 Considered by many as one of the greatest arrangers in the history of American popular music, Nelson Riddle was and is still well known for his talents. Having arranged for and played with big band greats Charlie Spivak and Tommy Dorsey in the 40s, he found his own sound in working with many famous vocalists from the 50's into the 80's: Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Dean Martin, Rosemary Clooney, and Linda Ronstadt. He also composed for movies and TV. While there were several good arrangers in the 50's and 60's, Nelson Riddle stands out as probably the most prolific, as illustrated by "Laugh In" hosts Rowan and Martin who would periodically punctuate their comedic dialogue with "arranged by Nelson Riddle."



Nelson Riddle, whose arrangements were an asset on some of Ella Fitzgerald's Song Book projects, also made two albums with her during 1961: this one plus Ella Swings Gently with Nelson. The singer has rarely sounded better than during this period. For the Swings Brightly set (which gets a slight edge over the other one), Fitzgerald sticks mostly to familiar standards and is particularly memorable on "Don't Be That Way," "What Am I Here For," "I'm Gonna Go Fishin'," and "I Won't Dance."

Born on April 25, 1917, in Newport News, Virginia, singer Ella Fitzgerald was the product of a common-law marriage between William Fitzgerald and Temperance "Tempie" Williams Fitzgerald. Ella experienced a troubled childhood that began with her parents separating just a month after her birth.

With her mother, Fitzgerald moved to Yonkers, New York. They lived there with her mother's boyfriend, Joseph De Sailva. The family grew in 1923 with the arrival of Fitzgerald's half-sister Frances. Struggling financially, she helped her family out by working as a messenger "running numbers" and acting as a lookout for a brothel. Her first career aspiration was to become a dancer.

After her mother's death in 1932, Fitzgerald ended up moving in with an aunt. She started skipping school. Fitzgerald was then sent to a special reform school, but she didn't stay there long. By 1934, Ella was trying to make it on her own and living on the streets. Still harboring dreams of becoming an entertainer, she entered an amateur contest at Harlem's Apollo Theater. She sang the Hoagy Carmichael tune "Judy" and wowed the audience. Fitzgerald performed a second song and went on to win the contest's \$25 first place prize.

The 1950s and '60s proved to be a time of critical and commercial success for Fitzgerald. She even earned the moniker "First Lady of Song" for her mainstream popularity and unparalleled vocal talents. Her unique ability to mimicking instrumental sounds helped popularize the vocal improvisation of "scatting" which became her signature technique.

In 1955, Fitzgerald began recording for Granz's newly created Verve Records. She made some of her most popular albums for Verve, starting out with 1956's Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Song Book. At the very first Grammy Awards in 1958, Fitzgerald picked up her first two Grammys—and made history as the first African-American woman to win a Grammy—for best individual jazz performance and best female vocal performance, respectively, for the two songbook projects Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Song Book and Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Irving Berlin Song Book; she worked directly with Ellington on the former album.

A truly collaborative soul, Fitzgerald produced great recordings with such artists as Louis Armstrong and Count Basie. She also performed several times with Frank Sinatra over the years as well. In 1960, Fitzgerald actually broke into the pop charts with her rendition of "Mack the Knife." She was still going strong well into the '70s, playing concerts across the globe. One especially memorable concert series from this time was a two-week engagement in New York City in 1974 with Frank Sinatra and Count Basie.

By the 1980s, Fitzgerald had begun to experience serious health problems. She had heart surgery in 1986, and then discovered she had diabetes. The disease left her blind, and she had both legs amputated in 1994. She made her last recording in 1989 and her last public performance in 1991 at New York's Carnegie Hall. Ella Fitzgerald died on June 15, 1996, at her home in Beverly Hills.

In all, Fitzgerald recorded more than 200 albums and some 2,000 songs in her lifetime. Her total record sales exceeded 40 million. Her many accolades included 13 Grammy Awards, the NAACP Image Award for Lifetime Achievement and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

While some critics complained that her style and voice lacked the depth of some her more bluesy counterparts, her success and the respect she garnered from the biggest names in the music industry showed that Fitzgerald was in a class all her own.

Ella Fitzgerald Swings Brightly with Nelson

Ella Fitzgerald Swings Brightly with Nelson

- 1 When Your Lover Has Gone 3:00
 - 2 Don't Be That Way 3:47
 - 3 Love Me Or Leave Me 2:49
 - 4 I Hear Music 2:19
 - 5 What Am I Here For? 2:43
 - 6 I'm Gonna Go Fishin' 3:00
 - 7 I Won't Dance 3:30
 - 8 I Only Have Eyes For You 2:37
 - 9 The Gentleman Is A Dope 3:58
 - 10 Mean To Me 2:55
 - 11 Alone Together 2:45
 - 12 Pick Yourself Up 2:06
- Total Time: 36:00**

Recorded by Verve Records January 5, 1959 - December 27, 1961

Produced by Norman Granz Engineer- Val Valentin