

Ella Fitzgerald – Live in '57 & '63 (Jazz Icons)

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Live in Belgium '57

1. *Angel Eyes*
2. *Lullaby Of Birdland*
3. *Love For Sale*
4. *Tenderly*
5. *April In Paris*
6. *Just One Of Those Things*
7. *Roll 'Em Pete*
8. *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*
9. *It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)*

Vocal- Ella Fitzgerald

Piano- Don Abney

Bass- Ray Brown

Drums- Jo Jones

Guitar- Herb Ellis

Additional Personnel on "It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)"

Trumpet- Roy Eldridge

Piano- Oscar Peterson

Live in Sweden '63

1. *No Moon At All*
2. *Just One Of Those Things*
3. *Runnin' Wild*
4. *Georgia On My Mind*
5. *Desafinado*
6. *Hallelujah, I Love Her So*
7. *Mack The Knife*

Vocal- Ella Fitzgerald

Piano- Tommy Flanagan

Bass- Jim Hughart

Drums- Gus Johnson

Guitar- Les Spann

Rather than a feeble, wordy attempt to relate the treasures found within, it is tempting to simply state that this 56-minute DVD -- which contains a pair of complete appearances from the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald -- is available. That in and of itself should serve as fair warning for any and all parties. However, there is considerably more to the story. For starters, as of this writing in 2008, the half-hour-plus contents from a June 6, 1957, date in Brussels, Belgium, is the earliest complete concert footage of Fitzgerald known to exist. Originally airing on the Belgian RTBF television network, *Jazz Pour Tous* -- which translates as *Jazz for All* -- offers the vocalist accompanied by an impressive combo with Don Abney (piano), Fitzgerald's ex-husband and still bandleader Ray Brown (bass), Jo Jones (drums), and Herb Ellis (guitar), as well as special guests Roy Eldridge (trumpet) and Oscar Peterson (piano). Fitzgerald and company get underway with one of her frequent openers, the lovely balladry of "Angel Eyes." She glides into her almost second-nature improvisations as she simultaneously unfurls her honey-soaked and expressive vocals. The audience is held spellbound, hanging upon her every intonation. They erupt upon the recognition of "Lullaby of Birdland" with a mixture of sheer excitement and sincere heartfelt enthusiasm. Fitzgerald rises to the occasion, unleashing a steady flow of freewheelin' scat-sung phrases on the spot with such perfect timing and emphasis that it is almost as if the notes had been written that way.

The mood turns decidedly introspective for a rare live airing of "Love for Sale" -- one of several selections hailing from *Sings the Cole Porter Song Book* (1956). Another hearty round of gratitude greets Fitzgerald as she commences the *Great American Songbook* entry "Tenderly." The moody arrangement exemplifies her breathy baritone that never sounds forced or unnatural. More evidence of the crowd's zeal can be heard as it all but buries the introduction and even Ella's first few lines during "April in Paris." As Will Friedwald points out in his detailed liner essay, the version heard here is clearly inspired by the Count Basie interpretation, right down to the false ending. "Just One of Those Things" is the only song to be presented in each of the 1957 and 1963 programs. They kick into high gear after a brief introduction from Fitzgerald with the 1963 reading getting honors for reasons we'll get into momentarily. The rest of the 1957 gig is nonstop highlights as "Roll 'Em Pete" finds the singer at her most playful, sending props to Joe Williams from the Count Basie Band and even Elvis Presley via the Carl Perkins-penned "Blue Suede Shoes." So who said Miss Ella wasn't hip?! For the encore of "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," Oscar Peterson and Roy Eldridge join the festivities for one final blowout that leaves viewers as breathless as the participants on-stage.

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Half a dozen years later, Fitzgerald is caught in the act during a jaunt through Sweden. Her short but sweet shot on Mork Sang may only clock in at 20 minutes, but she certainly packs a wallop within the high-energy set. Backing her are the formidable quartet of Tommy Flanagan (piano), Jim Hughart (bass), Gus Johnson (drums), and Les Spann (guitar). The emphasis seems to be on cuts from her recently released *Rhythm Is My Business* (1962) long-player, with "Runnin' Wild," "Hallelujah, I Love Him So," and the opening "No Moon at All" derived from that project. Each is unproblematic, matching other top-shelf renderings of these standards. The second beboppin' "Just One of Those Things" arguably out-grooves the former 1957 clip -- thanks to the looser and friskier vibe that, in truth, actually permeates the whole 1963 show. Likewise, fans and the curious alike will revel in the Latin-tinged "Desafinado" and the soul-stirrin' adaptation of Ray Charles' "Hallelujah, I Love Her So." Keep eyes and ears piqued during the closer, "Mack the Knife," for Fitzgerald's lighthearted mimicking of "Pops" Louis Armstrong, demonstrating her affinity for the man and his worldwide renown as the father of the genre. The affability of Ella Fitzgerald coupled with the powerhouse strength of every tune included here make *Jazz Icons: Live in '57 & '63* (2006) a no-brainer for all manner of music lover. ---Lindsay Planer, Rovi

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