

Ella Fitzgerald

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Background information

Birth name	Ella Jane Fitzgerald
Born	April 25, 1917
	Newport News, Virginia, United States
Died	June 15, 1996 (aged 79)
	Beverly Hills, California, United States
Genres	Swing, bebop, traditional pop, vocal jazz
Occupation(s)	Singer, actress
Instruments	Vocals
Years active	1934–1993
Labels	Capitol, Decca, Pablo, Reprise, Verve, Brunswick, HMV

Ella Jane Fitzgerald (April 25, 1917 – June 15, 1996) was an American jazz singer often referred to as the First Lady of Song, Queen of Jazz, and Lady Ella. She was noted for her purity of tone, impeccable diction, phrasing and intonation, and a "horn-like" improvisational ability, particularly in her scat singing.

After tumultuous teenage years, Fitzgerald found stability in musical success with performances on many stages in the Harlem area, including her rendition of the nursery rhyme "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" that helped boost her to fame. In 1942, Fitzgerald left the amateur performances behind, signed a deal with Decca Records, and started her solo career by redefining the art of scat singing. It was not until her manager, Norman Granz, built Verve Records based on her vocal abilities that she recorded some of her more widely noted works. Under this label, Fitzgerald focused more on singing than scatting, providing perhaps her most career-defining works in her interpretation of the Great American Songbook.

While Fitzgerald appeared in movies and as guests on popular television shows in the second half of the twentieth century, her musical collaborations with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Bill Kenny and the Ink Spots were some of her most notable acts outside of her solo career. These partnerships produced recognizable songs like "Dream a Little Dream of Me", "Cheek to Cheek", "Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall", and "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)". In 1993, Fitzgerald capped off her sixty-year career with her last public performance. Three years later, she died.

at the age of 79, following years of decline in her health. After her passing, Fitzgerald's influence lived on through her fourteen Grammy Awards, National Medal of Arts, Presidential Medal of Freedom, and tributes in the form of stamps, music festivals, and theater namesakes.

Early life

Fitzgerald was born on April 25, 1917 in Newport News, Virginia, the daughter of William Fitzgerald and Temperance "Tempie" Fitzgerald. Her parents were unmarried, and they had separated within a year of her birth. With her mother's new partner, a Portuguese immigrant named Joseph Da Silva, Fitzgerald and her mother moved to the city of Yonkers, in Westchester County, New York, as part of the first Great Migration of African Americans. Initially living in a single room, her mother and Da Silva soon found jobs. Her half-sister, Frances Da Silva, was born in 1923. By 1925, Fitzgerald and her family had moved to nearby School Street, then a predominantly poor Italian area. At the age of six, she began her formal education and moved through a variety of schools before attending Benjamin Franklin Junior High School from 1929.

Fitzgerald had been passionate about dancing from third grade, being a fan of Earl "Snakehips" Tucker in particular, and would perform for her peers on the way to school and at lunchtime. Fitzgerald and her family were Methodists and were active in the Bethany African Methodist Episcopal Church, and she regularly attended worship services, Bible study, and Sunday school. The church provided Fitzgerald with her earliest experiences in formal music making, and she may also have had a short series of piano lessons during this period.

As a child Fitzgerald listened to jazz recordings by Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby, and The Boswell Sisters. Fitzgerald idolized the Boswell Sisters' lead singer Connee Boswell, later saying, "My mother brought home one of her records, and I fell in love with it....I tried so hard to sound just like her."

In 1932, her mother died from a heart attack when Fitzgerald was 15 years of age. Following this trauma, Fitzgerald's grades dropped dramatically, and she frequently skipped school. Abused by her stepfather, she ran away to her aunt and, at one point, worked as a lookout at a bordello and with a Mafia-affiliated numbers runner. When the authorities caught up with her, she was first placed in the Colored Orphan Asylum in Riverdale, Bronx. However, when the orphanage proved too crowded, she was moved to the New York Training School for Girls in Hudson, New York, a state reformatory located about 120 miles north of New York City. Eventually she escaped and for a time she was homeless.

Early career

Fitzgerald made her singing debut at age 17 on November 21, 1934, at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York. She pulled in a weekly audience at the Apollo and won the opportunity to compete in one of the earliest of its famous "Amateur Nights". She had originally intended to go on stage and dance, but, intimidated by the Edwards Sisters, a local dance duo, she opted to sing instead in the style of Connee Boswell.^{[10][11]} She sang Boswell's "Judy" and "The Object of My Affection", a song recorded by the Boswell Sisters, and won the first prize of US \$25.00.

In January 1935, Fitzgerald won the chance to perform for a week with the Tiny Bradshaw band at the Harlem Opera House. She met drummer and bandleader Chick Webb there. Webb had already hired singer Charlie Linton to work with the band and was, The New York Times later wrote, "reluctant to sign her....because she was gawky and unkempt, a 'diamond in the rough'." Webb offered her the opportunity to test with his band when they played a dance at Yale University. She began singing regularly with his orchestra throughout 1935 at Harlem's Savoy Ballroom. Fitzgerald recorded several hit songs with them, including "Love and Kisses" and "(If You Can't Sing It) You'll Have to Swing It (Mr. Paganini)". But it was her 1938 version of the nursery rhyme, "A-Tisket, A-Tasket", a song she co-wrote, that brought her wide public acclaim.

Webb died on June 16, 1939, and his band was renamed Ella and her Famous Orchestra with Fitzgerald taking on the role of nominal bandleader. She recorded nearly 150 songs with the orchestra before it broke up in 1942; in her New York Times obituary of 1996, Stephen Holder wrote that "the majority of them (were) novelties and disposable pop fluff".

Decca years

Fitzgerald performing with Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Brown, Milt Jackson and Timme Rosenkrantz in September 1947, New York

In 1942, Fitzgerald left the band to begin a solo career. Now signed to the Decca label, she had several popular hits while recording with such artists as Bill Kenny & the Ink Spots, Louis Jordan, and the Delta Rhythm Boys.

With Decca's Milt Gabler as her manager, Fitzgerald began working regularly for the jazz impresario Norman Granz and appeared regularly in his Jazz at the Philharmonic (JATP) concerts. Her relationship with Granz was further cemented when he became her manager, although it would be nearly a decade before he could record her on one of his many record labels.

With the demise of the Swing era and the decline of the great touring big bands, a major change in jazz music occurred. The advent of bebop led to new developments in Fitzgerald's vocal style, influenced by her work with Dizzy Gillespie's big band. It was in this period that Fitzgerald started including scat singing as a major part of her performance repertoire. While singing with Gillespie, Fitzgerald recalled, "I just tried to do [with my voice] what I heard the horns in the band doing."

Her 1945 scat recording of "Flying Home" arranged by Vic Schoen would later be described by The New York Times as "one of the most influential vocal jazz records of the decade....Where other singers, most notably Louis Armstrong, had tried similar improvisation, no one before Miss Fitzgerald employed the technique with such dazzling inventiveness." Her bebop recording of "Oh, Lady Be Good!" (1947) was similarly popular and increased her reputation as one of the leading jazz vocalists.

Verve years

Fitzgerald was still performing at Granz's JATP concerts by 1955. She left Decca and Granz, now her manager, created Verve Records around her. She later described the period as strategically crucial, saying, "I had gotten to the point where I was only singing be-bop. I thought be-bop was 'it', and that all I had to do was go some place and sing bop. But it finally got to the point where I had no place to sing. I realized then that there was more to music than bop. Norman ... felt that I should do other things, so he produced The Cole Porter Songbook with me. It was a turning point in my life."

On March 15, 1955 Ella Fitzgerald opened her initial engagement at the Mocambo nightclub in Hollywood, after Marilyn Monroe lobbied the owner for the booking. The booking was instrumental in Fitzgerald's career. Bonnie Greer dramatized the incident as the musical drama, *Marilyn and Ella*, in 2008. It has been widely reported that Fitzgerald was the first Black performer to play the Mocambo, following Monroe's intervention, but this is not true. African-American singers Herb Jefferies, Eartha Kitt, and Joyce Bryan all played the Mocambo in 1952 and 1953, according to stories published at the time in *Jet* magazine and *Billboard*.

Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook, released in 1956, was the first of eight Songbook sets Fitzgerald would record for Verve at irregular intervals from 1956 to 1964. The composers and lyricists spotlighted on each set, taken together, represent the greatest part of the cultural canon known as the Great American Songbook. Her song selections ranged from standards to rarities and represented an attempt by Fitzgerald to cross over into a non-jazz audience. The sets are the most well-known items in her discography.

Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Song Book was the only Songbook on which the composer she interpreted played with her. Duke Ellington and his longtime collaborator Billy Strayhorn both appeared on exactly half the set's 38 tracks and wrote two new pieces of music for the album: "The E and D Blues" and a four-movement musical portrait of Fitzgerald (the only Songbook track on which Fitzgerald does not sing). The Songbook series ended up becoming the singer's most critically acclaimed and commercially successful work, and probably her most significant offering to American culture. The New York Times wrote in 1996, "These albums were among the first pop records to devote such serious attention to individual songwriters, and they were instrumental in establishing the pop album as a vehicle for serious musical exploration."

A few days after Fitzgerald's death, The New York Times columnist Frank Rich wrote that in the Songbook series Fitzgerald "performed a cultural transaction as extraordinary as Elvis' contemporaneous integration of white and African American soul. Here was a black woman popularizing urban songs often written by immigrant Jews to a national audience of predominantly white Christians." Frank Sinatra, out of respect for Fitzgerald, prohibited Capitol Records from re-releasing his own recordings in separate albums for individual composers in the same way.[citation needed]

Fitzgerald also recorded albums exclusively devoted to the songs of Porter and Gershwin in 1972 and 1983; the albums being, respectively, Ella Loves Cole and Nice Work If You Can Get It. A later collection devoted to a single composer was released during her time with Pablo Records, Ella Abraça Jobim, featuring the songs of Antônio Carlos Jobim.

While recording the Songbooks and the occasional studio album, Fitzgerald toured 40 to 45 weeks per year in the United States and internationally, under the tutelage of Norman Granz. Granz helped solidify her position as one of the

leading live jazz performers. In 1961 Fitzgerald bought a house in the Klampenborg district of Copenhagen, Denmark, after she began a relationship with a Danish man. Though the relationship ended after a year, Fitzgerald regularly returned to Denmark over the next three years, and even considered buying a jazz club there. The house was sold in 1963, and Fitzgerald permanently returned to the United States.

There are several live albums on Verve that are highly regarded by critics. Ella at the Opera House shows a typical JATP set from Fitzgerald. Ella in Rome and Twelve Nights in Hollywood display her vocal jazz canon. Ella in Berlin is still one of her best selling albums; it includes a Grammy-winning performance of "Mack the Knife" in which she forgets the lyrics, but improvises magnificently to compensate.

Verve Records was sold to MGM in 1963 for \$3 million and in 1967 MGM failed to renew Fitzgerald's contract. Over the next five years she flitted between Atlantic, Capitol and Reprise. Her material at this time represented a departure from her typical jazz repertoire. For Capitol she recorded Brighten the Corner, an album of hymns, Ella Fitzgerald's Christmas, an album of traditional Christmas carols, Misty Blue, a country and western-influenced album, and 30 by Ella, a series of six medleys that fulfilled her obligations for the label. During this period, she had her last US chart single with a cover of Smokey Robinson's "Get Ready", previously a hit for the Temptations, and some months later a top-five hit for Rare Earth.

The surprise success of the 1972 album *Jazz at Santa Monica Civic '72* led Granz to found Pablo Records, his first record label since the sale of Verve. Fitzgerald recorded some 20 albums for the label. Ella in London recorded live in 1974 with pianist Tommy Flanagan, guitarist Joe Pass, bassist Keter Betts and drummer Bobby Durham, was considered by many to be some of her best work. The following year she again performed with Joe Pass on German television station NDR in Hamburg. Her years with Pablo Records also documented the decline in her voice. "She frequently used shorter, stabbing phrases, and her voice was harder, with a wider vibrato", one biographer wrote. Plagued by health problems, Fitzgerald made her last recording in 1991 and her last public performances in 1993.

Film and television

In her most notable screen role, Fitzgerald played the part of singer Maggie Jackson in Jack Webb's 1955 jazz film *Pete Kelly's Blues*. The film costarred Janet Leigh and singer Peggy Lee. Even though she had already worked in the movies (she had sung briefly in the 1942 Abbott and Costello film *Ride 'Em Cowboy*), she was "delighted" when Norman Granz negotiated the role for her, and, "at the time....considered her role in the Warner Brothers movie the biggest thing ever to have happened to her." Amid *The New York Times* pan of the film when it opened in August 1955, the reviewer wrote, "About five minutes (out of ninety-five) suggest the picture this might have been. Take the ingenious prologue ... [or] take the fleeting scenes when the wonderful Ella Fitzgerald, allotted a few spoken lines, fills the screen and sound track with her strong mobile features and voice." Fitzgerald's race precluded major big-screen success. After *Pete Kelly's Blues*, she appeared in sporadic movie cameos, in *St. Louis Blues* (1958), and *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (1960). Much later, she appeared in the 1980s television drama *The White Shadow*.

She made numerous guest appearances on television shows, singing on *The Frank Sinatra Show*, *The Andy Williams Show*, *The Pat Boone Chevy Showroom*, and alongside other greats Nat King Cole, Dean Martin, Mel Tormé, and many others. She was also frequently featured on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Perhaps her most unusual and intriguing performance was of the "Three Little Maids" song from Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operetta *The Mikado* alongside Joan Sutherland and Dinah Shore on Shore's weekly variety series in 1963. A performance at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London was filmed and shown on the BBC. Fitzgerald also made a one-off appearance alongside Sarah Vaughan and Pearl Bailey on a 1979 television special honoring Bailey. In 1980, she performed a medley of standards in a duet with Karen Carpenter on the Carpenters' television program *Music, Music, Music*.

Fitzgerald also appeared in TV commercials, her most memorable being an ad for Memorex. In the commercials, she sang a note that shattered a glass while being recorded on a Memorex cassette tape. The tape was played back and the recording also broke the glass, asking: "Is it live, or is it Memorex?" She also starred in a number of commercials for Kentucky Fried Chicken, singing and scatting to the fast-food chain's longtime slogan, "We do chicken right!" Her final commercial campaign was for American Express, in which she was photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

Collaborations

Fitzgerald's most famous collaborations were with the vocal quartet Bill Kenny & the Ink Spots, trumpeter Louis Armstrong, the guitarist Joe Pass, and the bandleaders Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

From 1943 to 1950, Fitzgerald recorded seven songs with the Ink Spots featuring Bill Kenny. Out of all seven recordings, four reached the top of the pop charts including "I'm Making Believe" and "Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall" which both reached #1.

Fitzgerald recorded three Verve studio albums with Armstrong, two albums of standards (1956's *Ella and Louis* and 1957's *Ella and Louis Again*), and a third album featured music from the Gershwin musical *Porgy and Bess*. Fitzgerald also recorded a number of sides with Armstrong for Decca in the early 1950s.

Fitzgerald is sometimes referred to as the quintessential swing singer, and her meetings with Count Basie are highly regarded by critics. Fitzgerald features on one track on Basie's 1957 album *One O'Clock Jump*, while her 1963 album *Ella and Basie!* is remembered as one of her greatest recordings. With the 'New Testament' Basie band in full swing, and arrangements written by a young Quincy Jones, this album proved a respite from the 'Songbook' recordings and constant touring that Fitzgerald was engaged in during this period. Fitzgerald and Basie also collaborated on the 1972 album *Jazz at Santa Monica Civic '72*, and on the 1979 albums *Digital III at Montreux*, *A Classy Pair* and *A Perfect Match*.

Fitzgerald and Joe Pass recorded four albums together toward the end of Fitzgerald's career. She recorded several albums with piano accompaniment, but a guitar proved the perfect melodic foil for her. Fitzgerald and Pass appeared together on the albums *Take Love Easy* (1973), *Easy Living* (1986), *Speak Love* (1983) and *Fitzgerald and Pass... Again* (1976).

Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington recorded two live albums, and two studio albums. Her Duke Ellington Songbook placed Ellington firmly in the canon known as the Great American Songbook, and the 1960s saw Fitzgerald and the 'Duke' meet on the Côte d'Azur for the 1966 album *Ella and Duke at the Cote D'Azur*, and in Sweden for *The Stockholm Concert*, 1966. Their 1965 album *Ella at Duke's Place* is also extremely well received.

Fitzgerald had a number of famous jazz musicians and soloists as sidemen over her long career. The trumpeters Roy Eldridge and Dizzy Gillespie, the guitarist Herb Ellis, and the pianists Tommy Flanagan, Oscar Peterson, Lou Levy, Paul Smith, Jimmy Rowles, and Ellis Larkins all worked with Ella mostly in live, small group settings.

Possibly Fitzgerald's greatest unrealized collaboration (in terms of popular music) was a studio or live album with Frank Sinatra. The two appeared on the same stage only periodically over the years, in television specials in 1958 and 1959, and again on 1967's *A Man and His Music + Ella + Jobim*, a show that also featured Antônio Carlos Jobim. Pianist Paul Smith has said, "Ella loved working with [Frank]. Sinatra gave her his dressing-room on *A Man and His Music* and couldn't do enough for her." When asked, Norman Granz would cite "complex contractual reasons" for the fact that the two artists never recorded together. Fitzgerald's appearance with Sinatra and Count Basie in June 1974 for a series of concerts at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas, was seen as an important incentive for Sinatra to return from his self-imposed retirement of the early 1970s. The shows were a great success, and September 1975 saw them gross \$1,000,000 in two weeks on Broadway, in a triumvirate with the Count Basie Orchestra.

Later life and death

In 1985, Fitzgerald was hospitalized briefly for respiratory problems, in 1986 for congestive heart failure, and in 1990 for exhaustion. In March 1990 she appeared at the Royal Albert Hall in London, England with the Count Basie Orchestra for the launch of Jazz FM, plus a gala dinner at the Grosvenor House Hotel at which she performed. In 1993, she had to have both of her legs amputated below the knee due to the effects of diabetes. Her eyesight was affected as well.

In 1996, tired of being in the hospital, she wished to spend her last days at home. Confined to a wheelchair, she spent her final days in her backyard of her Beverly Hills mansion on Whittier, with her son Ray and 12-year-old granddaughter, Alice. "I just want to smell the air, listen to the birds and hear Alice laugh," she reportedly said. On her last day, she was wheeled outside one last time, and sat there for about an hour. When she was taken back in, she looked up with a soft smile on her face and said, "I'm ready to go now." She died in her home on June 15, 1996 at the age of 79. A few hours after her death, the Playboy Jazz Festival was launched at the Hollywood Bowl. In tribute, the marquee read: "Ella We Will Miss You." Her funeral was private, and she was buried at Inglewood Park Cemetery in Los Angeles.

Personal life

Fitzgerald married at least twice, and there is evidence that she may have married a third time. Her first marriage was in 1941, to Benny Kornegay, a convicted drug dealer and local dockworker. The marriage was annulled in 1942.

Her second marriage was in December 1947, to the famous bass player Ray Brown, whom she had met while on tour with Dizzy Gillespie's band a year earlier. Together they adopted a child born to Fitzgerald's half-sister, Frances, whom they christened Ray Brown, Jr. With Fitzgerald and Brown often busy touring and recording, the child was largely raised by his mother's aunt, Virginia. Fitzgerald and Brown divorced in 1953, bowing to the various career pressures both were experiencing at the time, though they would continue to perform together.

In July 1957, Reuters reported that Fitzgerald had secretly married Thor Einar Larsen, a young Norwegian, in Oslo. She had even gone as far as furnishing an apartment in Oslo, but the affair was quickly forgotten when Larsen was sentenced to five months' hard labor in Sweden for stealing money from a young woman to whom he had previously been engaged.

Fitzgerald was also notoriously shy. Trumpet player Mario Bauzá, who played behind Fitzgerald in her early years with Chick Webb, remembered that "she didn't hang out much. When she got into the band, she was dedicated to her

music....She was a lonely girl around New York, just kept herself to herself, for the gig." When, later in her career, the Society of Singers named an award after her, Fitzgerald explained, "I don't want to say the wrong thing, which I always do but I think I do better when I sing."

Fitzgerald was a quiet but ardent supporter of many charities and non-profit organizations, including the American Heart Association and the City of Hope Medical Center. In 1993, she established the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation.

Discography and collections

The primary collections of Fitzgerald's media and memorabilia reside at and are shared between the Smithsonian Institution and the US Library of Congress

Awards, citations and honors

Fitzgerald won thirteen Grammy Awards, and received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1967.

Other major awards and honors she received during her career were the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Medal of Honor Award, National Medal of Art, first Society of Singers Lifetime Achievement Award, named "Ella" in her honor, Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the George and Ira Gershwin Award for Lifetime Musical Achievement, UCLA Spring Sing.[54] Across town at the University of Southern California, she received the USC "Magnum Opus" Award which hangs in the office of the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation. In 1990, she received an honorary doctorate of Music from Harvard University.

Tributes and legacy

The career history and archival material from Ella's long career are housed in the Archives Center at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, while her personal music arrangements are at the Library of Congress. Her extensive cookbook collection was donated to the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, and her extensive collection of published sheet music was donated to UCLA.

In 1997, Newport News, Virginia created a music festival with Christopher Newport University to honor Ella Fitzgerald in her birth city. The Ella Fitzgerald Music Festival is designed to teach the region's youth of the musical legacy of Fitzgerald and jazz. Past performers at the week-long festival include: Diana Krall, Arturo Sandoval, Jean Carne, Phil Woods, Aretha Franklin, Victoria Wyndham, Charles Keating, Freda Payne, Cassandra Wilson, Ethel Ennis, David Sanborn, Jane Monheit, Dianne Reeves, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Ramsey Lewis, Patti Austin, Lalah Hathaway, Ledisi, Chrisette Michele, Natalie Cole, Freddie Jackson, Joe Harnell, Roy Ayers and Ann Hampton Callaway.

Callaway, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Patti Austin have all recorded albums in tribute to Fitzgerald. Callaway's album *To Ella with Love* (1996) features fourteen jazz standards made popular by Fitzgerald, and the album also features the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. Bridgewater's album *Dear Ella* (1997) featured many musicians that were closely associated with Fitzgerald during her career, including the pianist Lou Levy, the trumpeter Benny Powell, and Fitzgerald's second husband, double bassist Ray Brown. Bridgewater's following album, *Live at Yoshi's*, was recorded live on April 25, 1998, what would have been Fitzgerald's 81st birthday.

Austin's album, *For Ella* (2002) features 11 songs most immediately associated with Fitzgerald, and a twelfth song, "Hearing Ella Sing" is Austin's tribute to Fitzgerald. The album was nominated for a Grammy. In 2007, *We All Love Ella*, was released, a tribute album recorded for the 90th anniversary of Fitzgerald's birth. It featured artists such as Michael Bublé, Natalie Cole, Chaka Khan, Gladys Knight, Diana Krall, k.d. lang, Queen Latifah, Ledisi, Dianne Reeves, Linda Ronstadt, and Lizz Wright, collating songs most readily associated with the "First Lady of Song". Folk singer Odetta's album *To Ella* (1998) is dedicated to Fitzgerald, but features no songs associated with her. Her accompanist Tommy Flanagan affectionately remembered Fitzgerald on his album *Lady be Good ... For Ella* (1994).

"Ella, elle l'a", a tribute to Fitzgerald written by Michel Berger and performed by French singer France Gall, was a hit in Europe in 1987 and 1988. Fitzgerald is also referred to in the 1976 Stevie Wonder hit "Sir Duke" from his album *Songs in the Key of Life*, and the song "I Love Being Here With You", written by Peggy Lee and Bill Schluger. Sinatra's 1986 recording of "Mack the Knife" from his album *L.A. Is My Lady* (1984) includes a homage to some of the song's previous performers, including 'Lady Ella' herself. She is also honored in the song "First Lady" by Canadian artist Nikki Yanofsky.

In 2008, the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News named its brand new 276-seat theater the Ella Fitzgerald Theater. The theater is located several blocks away from her birthplace on Marshall Avenue. The Grand Opening performers (October 11 and 12, 2008) were Roberta Flack and Queen Esther Marrow.

In 2012, Rod Stewart performed a "virtual duet" with Ella Fitzgerald on his Christmas album *Merry Christmas, Baby*, and his television special of the same name.

In 2013, Google paid tribute to Ella by celebrating her 96th birthday with a Google Doodle on its US homepage.

There is a bronze sculpture of Fitzgerald in Yonkers, the city in which she grew up, created by American artist Vinnie Bagwell. It is located southeast of the main entrance to the Amtrak/Metro-North Railroad station in front of the city's old trolley barn. A bust of Fitzgerald is on the campus of Chapman University in Orange, California. On January 9, 2007, the United States Postal Service announced that Fitzgerald would be honored with her own postage stamp. The stamp was released in April 2007 as part of the Postal Service's Black Heritage series.