

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

*Presents*

**OH! LADY, BE GOOD**

RECORDED BY ELLA FITZGERALD

ARRANGED BY NELSON RIDDLE

PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

**FULL SCORE**

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

JLP-9416

WORDS BY IRA GERSHWIN

MUSIC BY GEORGE GERSHWIN

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A NOT-FOR-PROFIT JAZZ RESEARCH ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO PRESERVING AND PROMOTING AMERICA'S MUSICAL HERITAGE.



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## OH! LADY, BE GOOD (1959)

### **Background:**

Truly the First Lady of Song, Ella Fitzgerald was one of the greatest singers in American history. As her official website perfectly states, “Her voice was flexible, wide-ranging, accurate, and ageless. She could sing sultry ballads, sweet jazz, and imitate every instrument in an orchestra.” She enthralled audiences all over the world for decades, worked with everyone from Duke, Dizzy, and Count Basie to Nat King Cole and Sinatra, and left a recorded legacy that is second to none.

Born Ella Jane Fitzgerald on April 25, 1917 in Newport News, Virginia, Ella endured some rough times as a child. Following the split of her parents, she moved with her mother to Yonkers, NY, and sadly lost her mother at age 15. Fighting poverty, Ella eventually used these difficult times as motivation in life, and continued to harbor dreams of being an entertainer. She made her public singing debut at the Apollo Theater in Harlem on November 21, 1934 at age 17. Buoyed by her success, she continued to enter and win singing contests, and soon was singing with Chick Webb’s band. In 1938 she quickly gained acclaim with her version of *A-Tisket, A Tasket*, which was a huge success and made her famous at age 21; for over 50 years she remained a star.

Following Webb’s death in 1939, Ella briefly led the band, and soon struck out on her own as a solo artist, taking on various projects as well as making her film debut. While on tour with Dizzy Gillespie in the mid-1940s, Ella began to respond to the massive changes in the jazz world, as swing was giving way to bebop; she began incorporating scat singing into her repertoire as a reaction to the improvisational nature of bebop. As she recalled years later “I just tried to do [with my voice] what I heard the horns in the band doing.” During this period, she also met bassist Ray Brown, whom she was to marry and adopt a son with. Through Brown, she met jazz impresario and producer Norman Granz, and this relationship led to her greatest stardom and achievements.

Ella joined Granz’s Jazz at the Philharmonic Tour, recorded classic albums with Louis Armstrong, and from 1956-1964 worked on what may be her greatest legacy, the Song Book series, featuring the music of Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, the Gershwins, Harold Arlen, Jerome Kern, and Johnny Mercer. It can be argued that along with the seminal work of Frank Sinatra, these records created some of the greatest and most definitive versions of a huge portion of what comprises the Great American Songbook. Ira Gershwin famously remarked, “I never knew how good our songs were until I heard Ella Fitzgerald sing them.” Ella also did what music can uniquely do in tying together many strands of American culture at a time when race relations were a major issue in American society. Critic Frank Rich expressed it so well shortly after Ella’s death, writing about her Song Book series: “Here was a black woman popularizing urban songs often written by immigrant Jews to a national audience of predominantly white Christians.”

Ella toured constantly during these years, and she and Granz did their part to help the burgeoning civil rights movement, fighting inequality and discrimination at every turn, bravely even in the Deep South. During the 1960s Ella continued to tour and record, also appearing in movies and being a regular guest on all of the most popular talk and variety TV shows. Throughout the 1970s, she kept touring all over the world, and became even more well-known through a series of high-profile ad campaigns. Anyone who grew up in the 1970s remembers Ella’s “Is it live or is it Memorex” commercials.

One of the lesser-known aspects of her life at the time was her charitable side. She was known as a very shy person who was protective of her privacy. As a way to help others avoid what she went through as a child, she gave frequent generous donations to all sorts of groups and organizations that helped underprivileged youth, and her official website even suggests that continuing to be able to this was a major driving force behind the unrelenting touring schedule she continued to maintain. She cared for her sister Frances’ family after Frances passed as well.

By the 1980s, she had acquired countless awards and honors, among them 13 Grammys including the Lifetime Achievement Award and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. But the endless touring schedule did begin to take its toll, and Ella began to experience serious diabetes-related health problems. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s she suffered a series of surgeries and hospital stays, and by 1996 she had tired of spending so much time in hospitals. She spent her last days enjoying being outdoors at her Beverly Hills home, sitting outside and simply being with she and Ray Brown's adopted son Ray, Jr. and her granddaughter Alice. Many sources report that during her last days she reportedly said, "I just want to smell the air, listen to the birds, and hear Alice laugh."

She died in her home on June 15, 1996 at the age of 79, and the tributes were instant, huge, and international. Befitting someone of her stature, who was at the pinnacle of the entertaining world for nearly half a century and left behind a legacy that will never diminish in its beauty and importance, her archival material and arrangements reside at the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian.

There are few figures in American history who left behind what Ella did. A shy, reticent woman from very humble beginnings, she thrilled countless millions all over the world with her beautiful voice and her singular way of interpreting a tune. She sang in so many styles, worked with so many of the best composers and arrangers in the music business, performed with most of the other greatest stars of her era, and left a body of work that truly enhances the American experience.

### **The Music:**

In 1959, arranger Nelson Riddle was at the top of the arranging world, internationally famous, having worked with Nat King Cole, Dean Martin, Judy Garland, and others, and was best-known for arranging some of the all-time greatest works of Frank Sinatra, including *Songs for Swingin' Lovers* and *A Swingin' Affair*. Riddle and Fitzgerald had never worked together, and their musical marriage was a seemingly obvious one, especially for a canon such as that of the Gershwins. Recorded in several sessions during the first seven months of 1959, the project became the largest of Fitzgerald's career, and was further enhanced by the support of Ira Gershwin, who apparently contributed lyrics to some songs which had previously lacked them in finished form. As with other entries in the series, both well-known classics and rarities were recorded, resulting in a wonderfully thorough presentation. The completed project received universal acclaim, and *But Not For Me* received the 1960 Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. In perhaps the greatest testament to the brilliance of Ella Fitzgerald and the interpretations of the Gershwin Songbook created by she and Nelson Riddle, Ira Gershwin has been famously quoted as saying, "I never knew how good our songs were until I heard Ella Fitzgerald sing them."

*Ella Fitzgerald Sings the George and Ira Gershwin Songbook* was the high point in the series of songbook packages produced by Norman Granz for the Verve label. There had been four such projects beforehand: boxes of songs by Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, Duke Ellington, and Irving Berlin. Granz decided to make the Gershwin box the most ambitious of all of them: 5 LPs plus a 7" limited edition bonus disc that included Riddle arrangements of Gershwin instrumental compositions. This project had the enthusiastic cooperation and participation of lyricist Ira Gershwin who attended the recording sessions and re-wrote lyrics for the occasion. This was the first songbook session that Nelson Riddle participated in. Granz had wanted Riddle to arrange music for the previous songbooks, but he was unavailable at the time.

In the jazz world, the Brothers Gershwin's *Oh! Lady, Be Good* is a jam session favorite that is typically taken at a medium to fast clip. This Nelson Riddle arrangement for Ella Fitzgerald, however, is performed mostly as a gentle ballad. Although this makes it stand out as is, the chart also serves as a textbook example of Riddle's string writing at its most lush.

### **Notes to the Conductor:**

A brief and slightly brisk introduction by the strings sets up the verse at measure 5. The vocalist can interpret the verse in a fairly rubato manner, however this section should overall have a vague 2-feel to it. Make sure your string players are aware of the loose tempo here, as it will require attentiveness to execute properly. The final four measures of the verse begin to settle down, finally transitioning into both the main melody and a stable genius ballad tempo at measure 21. Fitzgerald's interpretation is fairly straight and devoid of embellishments, while Riddle's writing provides almost epically soaring accompaniment in between the gaps. In addition to this, the pianist can provide some gentle fills in and around the first half of the melody.

The second bridge of the melody at measure 53 sees a return to the chart's rubato beginning for a brief moment before the tempo returns for the final A section at measure 61. The arrangement's outro serves as a perfect conclusion, as everything gently winds down beginning with the violins playing a tagged melody line. The vocals return shortly thereafter as the tempo gradually slows. Once the final note of the melody is reached, the harp and celeste pay a gentle chiming figure that resolves into a pleasantly mellow conclusion.

This publication has been prepared from Riddle's original pencil score as used during the recording session - this is not a transcription.

### **Acknowledgments:**

Special thanks to the Ella Fitzgerald Estate and Charitable Foundation for granting us permission to publish this arrangement.

**Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, and Rob DuBoff**

- January 2020

*Oh! Lady Be Good* "LADY BE GOOD" ELLA FITZGERALD  
 Allen Rish © Ira Gershwin ©

1  
 Trumpets 2  
 3

1  
 Trombs. 2  
 3  
 (TAPT TACT)

Drums  
 For Small Str Section Follow Blue Markings

Hp  
 101 A  
 Violins B  
 C  
 101  
 Viola  
 Cello  
 Bass  
 P

Here is the first page of Nelson Riddle's original pencil score for Oh! Lady, Be Good.

# OH! LADY, BE GOOD

RECORDED BY ELLA FITZGERALD

## SCORE

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY GEORGE GERSHWIN

AND IRA GERSHWIN

ARRANGED BY NELSON RIDDLE

PREPARED BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

RUBATO, QUICKLY

RALL.

The score is written for a 4/4 time signature. The vocal line is in the key of B-flat major. The instrumental parts include Violin I, II, and III, Viola, Cello, Harp, Guitar, Celeste/Piano, Bass, and Drum Set. The score is divided into four measures, with the first measure marked 'RUBATO, QUICKLY' and the second through fourth measures marked 'RALL.'. The dynamic marking 'mf' is used for the string parts. The harp part includes the following chord voicings: Eb F Gb Ab and Db C Bb. The drum set part is marked 'Brushes'.

2

3

4

5 IN 2 RUBATO

Vox.  
Lis - ten to my tale of woe, it's ter - rib - ly sad but true.

Vln. I  
*mp*

Vln. II  
*mp*

Vln. III  
*mp* unis. div.

Vla.  
*mp*

Vc.  
unis.  
*mp*

Hp.  
w/ celeste  
*mf*

Cel.  
w/ harp  
*mf*

Bs.  
arco  
*mp*

5 6 7 8