

*Presents*

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

# **ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND**

AS RECORDED BY ELLA FITZGERALD

ARRANGED BY PAUL WESTON

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

## **FULL SCORE**

JLP-9675

WORDS AND MUSIC BY IRVING BERLIN

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



THE JAZZ LINES FOUNDATION INC.

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# ELLA FITZGERALD SERIES

## ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND (1958)

### **Ella Fitzgerald Biography:**

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. 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.

## **Paul Weston Biography:**

Paul Weston enjoyed a long, distinguished, diverse career as a composer, arranger, bandleader, conductor, and pianist, he worked extensively in movies, radio, and television, was instrumental in the creation of the genre that became known as "Mood Music," had a Grammy-winning musical comedy duet with wife Jo Stafford, and was involved in the founding and growth of National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, the organization behind the Grammy Awards.

Born Paul Wetstein in Springfield, Massachusetts, on March 12, 1912, Weston, like so many folks who carve out unique and powerful positions for themselves in the music world, grew up in a music-loving household. Both parents enjoyed music, and Paul was exposed to a variety of sounds as a child, starting piano lessons at a young age. Eventually attending Dartmouth College, he excelled in his study of economics and formed his own band. Moving to New York City after graduation, he studied at Columbia University while beginning to write extensively. It was a train accident during his college years that led him down the path that was to become his life. As his wife Jo Stafford tells it, "...he was hurt pretty badly. And he spent a lot of time after that recuperating in bed. And to pass time, he got some books on arranging. And was just studying it for [a] pastime, and learned a lot."

He sold his first arrangements to Joe Haymes in 1934, and eventually attracted the attention of Rudy Vallee, who offered Weston a job writing for his radio show. This led to his meeting Tommy Dorsey, whose band he joined and remained with as an arranger for the latter half of the 1930s.

Striking out on his own in 1940, he worked with various artists, including the young Dinah Shore. He soon moved to Los Angeles to work with Bob Crosby on music for his brother Bing's film, *Holiday Inn*. He continued to work on films and soon met Johnny Mercer, who was in the process of creating Capitol Records. The two got on well, and Weston was brought onboard as a writer/arranger, eventually becoming music director for the new label. He worked with many of its stars, including Jo Stafford, who would later become his wife, and helped the fledgling label begin its climb to prominence.

During this period, as the swing/big band era began to fade from dominance, Weston perceived the shifting tastes of the public and began experimenting with music that would accompany or be a background to life's daily activities and "that wouldn't compete with conversation." This became known as "Mood Music" (a term Weston may have disliked) and soon became very popular. His 1945 *Music for Dreaming* is regarded by some as the beginning of the genre. Never one inclined to overly praise his own work, he explained Mood Music this way: "All I did was add strings to a dance band" he once explained. "The reason it still swung was because I used good jazz musicians."

1950 saw him move to Columbia along with his soon-to-be wife Stafford. They married in 1952 and had a son and a daughter. As the 1950s progressed, Weston eventually participated in the production of many top ten records, hosted his own radio show, did some acting, continued his string of Mood Music recordings, and was named musical director for NBC TV in 1957. Becoming a prominent figure in the recording capital of the world, he became a force in the group that was to create what became the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, which would work to preserve and promote America's burgeoning recording industry. This included their creating the Grammys to celebrate the greatest annual achievements of their industry in the manner of the Oscars and the Emmys.

In the mid-1950s, Weston began playing piano for friends and at parties as a character who would play standards in a rather unconventional (and off-key) manner. This soon took on a life of its own as some record executives really enjoyed it, and it morphed into recordings with Stafford as singer of the musical comedy act Jonathan and Darlene Edwards. They eventually released an album in 1957, *The Piano Artistry of Jonathan Edwards*; their identities unknown until revealed in a Time Magazine article later that year. The Edwards duo became unlikely stars, and 1960's Jonathan and Darlene Edwards in Paris won the Grammy for Best Comedy Album. The act would continue to have a devoted following and the two would revisit it into the 1980s.

While Weston's talents resulted in his being involved in a very wide range of projects, a large part of his heart always remained firmly in the jazz and popular music genre. Along with Axel Stordahl and Sammy Cahn, in the mid-1940s he was one of the writers of *I Should Care* and *Day By Day*, which were very successfully recorded by Frank Sinatra and became jazz standards. In 1958 he worked on what can be considered among his finest achievements, arranging and conducting the fourth in Ella Fitzgerald's classic and historic Song Book series, *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Irving Berlin Songbook*. The eight Song Book records featured the music of America's greatest songwriters and were arranged by such giants as Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, Nelson Riddle, Billy May, and Buddy Bregman. Weston permanently engraved a spot for himself in what can be considered to be one of the most important and timeless collections of work by any singer in American music history. The record was nominated for multiple awards, and Ella won the inaugural Grammy for Best Vocal Performance, Female.

His career as musical director for television included shows featuring Danny Kaye, Jonathan Winters, Jim Nabors, and Bob Newhart, as well as his wife's *Jo Stafford Show*, a show for Chevy, and many specials as well. He was also very interested in religious music, and founded Corinthian Records to distribute it. He wrote symphonic works as well, one of which, *Crescent City Suite: The Music of New Orleans* from 1957, was well-received and especially appreciated in the city it was rooted in. It has been performed by many orchestras and many times in New Orleans, including at the opening of the New Orleans Superdome. In 1971 he was awarded the Trustees' Award from the Grammys for his dedication to helping raise the profile of American music.

By the mid-1970s, Weston and Stafford were mostly retired, and spent a lot of time together and working with charities. Paul passed away on September 20, 1996 at age 84 in Santa Monica, California. He and Stafford had been married for 44 years, and by all accounts-including hers-their marriage was a great one. "Not in the least with us," she recalled as to whether they had problems. "I can't speak for everybody, but we never had...the minds just met. No problems." Stafford spent much of her remaining years enjoying her grandchildren and keeping Paul's legacy alive: "I think he would like his music remembered," she concluded. "That would be good for music, wouldn't it?"

Exceptionally intelligent, Paul Weston seemingly could have taken a variety of career paths but ultimately found music to be his true love. Blessed with a diverse skill set that was very well-developed, he was funny and unpretentious, well-liked, charitable, and a devoted family man. Weston was of one of the figures who built the towering edifice that is mid-20th century American popular music. His legacy is that

of a man who was skilled enough to be comfortable in a wide variety of settings, especially when backing female singers, he had the foresight and creativity to help create what came to be known as Mood Music, his skills helped what started as a whimsical parody idea evolve into an act that won a Grammy and countless fans, his reputation led him to be in-demand in music, movies, and television and to work with many great musicians. He remains today a figure universally revered for his contributions to American music during the years when the sounds being created in Southern California were reverberating powerfully in their evolution to global dominance.

### **The Music:**

*Alexander's Ragtime Band*, written by Irving Berlin, is one of the earliest popular songs to become a jazz standard. Paul Weston's arrangement for Ella Fitzgerald's *Irving Berlin Songbook* album (1958) is a highly creative re-imagining of the tune, swapping back and forth between two different styles to both pay tribute to the song's roots as well as give it a stylish update. It can also serve as a good mid-set break for your band's lead brass players, who leave most of the heavy lifting to the rest of their sections.

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

After the introduction, the first pass through the melody consists of a Dixieland-style combo providing some raucous collective improvisation behind the vocals. Weston fully wrote out this section (and what he arranged is included in this publication), but chords are provided in the event that your ensemble wishes to improvise this (as the band did for the 1958 recording). Whenever this configuration appears, the rhythm section should play with a heavy-handed, hard swinging backbeat. After getting a brief spotlight to themselves, a different combo takes over at measure 49. This group is a more modernist configuration, featuring ensemble writing that is clearly inspired by the cool-school sound of the Dave Pell Octet. At this time, the rhythm section should shift to a more reserved, gentle approach to timekeeping. When Fitzgerald starts to wrap up the second melody, she alters the lyrics to give a nod to each of the two combos, before bringing the whole band back together for a delightfully energetic conclusion.

This publication was prepared from Paul Weston's pencil score - this is not a transcription.

Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, and Rob DuBoff  
- January 2026



LYWOOD  
PAPERS

To the left is the first page of Paul Weston's pencil score of *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, recorded by Ella Fitzgerald in



## SCORE

## ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND

AS RECORDED BY ELLA FITZGERALD

WORDS AND MUSIC BY IRVING BERLIN

ARRANGED BY PAUL WESTON

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

BRIGHT SWING ♩ = 170

Vocal

Woodwind 1: Alto Sax.

Woodwind 2: Clarinet/Alto Sax.

Woodwind 3: Tenor Sax.

Woodwind 4: Tenor Sax.

Woodwind 5: Baritone Sax.

Trumpet 1

Trumpet 2

Trumpet 3

Trumpet 4

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Trombone 3

Trombone 4

Guitar

Piano

Acoustic Bass

Drum Set

Clarinet lead

backbeat

sim.

(4)

(6)

fill

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Chords:  $B^b_6$  (in 2)  $B^b_7$   $E^b_6$   $A^b_7$   $A^b_6$   $B^b_6$   $G_m7$   $C7^{(9)}$   $F7$   $B^b_6$   $B^b_7$   $E^b_6$   $E^{\circ}7$   $B^b_6/F$   $C_m7/F$   $B^b_6$

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9

Vox. hear, \_\_\_\_\_ come on and hear Al - ex - an - der's rag - time band \_\_\_\_\_ Come on and hear, \_\_\_\_\_ come on and hear, it's the best band in the land. \_\_\_\_\_ They can

opt. ad lib behind vocals

Ww. 2 (Cl.) *mf* *opt. ad lib behind vocals*

Ww. 3 (T. Sx.) *mf* *opt. ad lib behind vocals*

Tpt. 4 *mf* *opt. ad lib behind vocals*

Tbn. 1 *mf*

Gtr. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

Bs. *mf*

D. S. backbeat *mf* *sim.* (4) (8)

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16