

MONTRÉUX

1972

Ella



2310-751



Ella Fitzgerald

at the Montreux Jazz Festival 1975

Tommy Flanagan • Keter Betts • Bobby Durham

Side 1

- 1. Caravan**
(Ellington/Tizol/Mills)
American Academy of
Music Inc./ASCAP
- 2. Satin Doll**
(Ellington/Strayhorn/Mercer)
Tempo Music Inc./ASCAP
- 3. Teach Me Tonight**
(De Paul/Cahn)
HUB Music Inc./ASCAP
- 4. Wave**
(Jobim)
Corcovado Music Corp./ASCAP
- 5. It's All Right With Me**
(Porter)
Chappell & Co. Inc./ASCAP
- 6. Let's Do It**
(Porter)
Warner Bros. Music/ASCAP

Side 2

- 1. How High The Moon**
(Lewis/Hamilton)
Chappell & Co. Inc./ASCAP
- 2. The Girl From Ipanema**
(Jobim/de Moraes/Gimbel)
Duchess Music Corp./ASCAP
- 3. T'aint Nobody's Bizness**
(Grainger/Robins)
MCA Music Inc./ASCAP

Personnel:

Ella Fitzgerald, Vocals
Tommy Flanagan, Piano
Keter Betts, Bass
Bobby Durham, Drums

Produced by Norman Granz

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Liner notes by Benny Green
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Festival July 17th, 1975

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Jam, 2310 752 Pass, 2310 753 Jackson,
2310 754 The Trumpet Kings, 2625-707
The Montreux Collection.

The last session of the night at Montreux on July 17, 1975 was the one which had aroused the most expectancy, which was natural enough, as it was the one featuring Ella Fitzgerald. Earlier that evening, and for most of the previous night, audiences had been sated with instrumental brilliance so comprehensive that the Festival posters could hardly contain all the names involved. Ella's recital was slightly different from what had gone before, because the details of the performance were unknown to the audience before that performance actually began. Nobody was sure what kind of group would accompany Ella or what kind of programme she would favour. And not only did nobody know, but I should guess that nobody cared very much either. People realised years ago that Ella is sufficient unto herself, and that whether she uses a small group or a large orchestra, she remains unique. As it turned out, the Montreux audience got its answers within the first two and a half minutes, which is roughly the length which "Caravan" runs. They saw that it was to be a trio and that it was to be an out-and-out jazz night, whose details are a little more complex than the list of song titles suggest.

On the face of it, it would appear that Ella sang 9 songs. But those who are at all familiar with Ella's approach to a concert of this kind will not be surprised to find that strewn about among the listed items are innumerable references to other works, some of them in the popular canon, others very far removed from it indeed. That is neither the Ella of the definitive orchestral recordings, providing meticulous readings from the master-composers, nor the Ella of the more formally constituted concert hall, divided from the audience by the great gulf of the footlights and the orchestra pit. This is Ella backed by a jazz trio performing before an audience which somehow manages to reconcile its size with the spirit of intimacy to be looked for in a club. There is a euphoric anticipation in the air, and the result is that Ella, completely relaxed, scatters through her programme more allusions than the mind can identify at first hearing.

Without having made notes at the time, I seem to recall her having jogged my memory with regard to such items as "Dardanella", "Heat Wave", "Rhapsody in Blue", "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top", "I'm Beginning to See the Light", "Poinciana", "Deep Purple", "Rockin' in Rhythm", "Chicago", "Idaho", "Anthropology", "Matchmaker", "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes", "Peter and the Wolf", and even a slight smattering of one or two Italian operatic arias.

What the reactions of the composers of these items would be to these fleeting references to their beloved brainchildren there is no way of knowing, but as Ella has at various times given more fulsome treatment to almost all of them, I don't suppose anyone would complain. Provided one enters into the right spirit to enjoy such an exhibition, the result is a kind of whimsical musical game in which references fly past and settle briefly on certain appropriate harmonic perches before disappearing again as the chords change once more. Ella's lightness of touch as she plays this game often conceals the art that lies behind it, but it is a form of improvisation requiring great confidence and experience.

(Sometimes, when Ella sings these catalogues completely unaccompanied, the heart of the listening musician leaps into his mouth for fear of hearing Ella stumble; she never does). As in all Ella's albums, there are moments in this one of positively instrumental ingenuity in the way in which the original melody has been amended. There are some especially vivid examples in "It's Alright With Me" and also in "Caravan", which she assuredly sets the pattern for the rest of the night's entertainment. But some of the other tracks represent a different kind of approach to singing. Of these none is more extraordinary than "Wave", which never bothers with the lyric at all, goes straight into a scat chorus and gradually evolves into a kind of vocal doodling pad on which Ella scribbles the random thoughts of a devoted collector. The same element pops up in "How High the Moon", in the anthology of musical themes with which the track

ends, but the spirit of laughter which informs this catalogue once again, should not detract from the cleverness and correctitude of the improvisations, or from the naturalness with which they come out of Ella.

That she paces herself like an instrumentalist is shown in track after track, where the decorous opening steadily builds into uninhibited jazzmaking. (A perfect barometer for measuring this process is Bobby Durham's drumming, which steps up its force and volume each time to match the buoyancy and authority of the singing). All three accompanying musicians are integrated closely into the performance. In "It's Alright With Me", the opening takes the form of a finely balanced duet between Ella and Keter Betts; not till the second 16 does Tommy Flanagan enter, whereas in Cole Porter's "Let's Do It", the duet is between voice and piano. In a sense the session attains its most profound moments with the encore to the encore, "Taint Nobody's Bizness", one of those not-quite-a-blues which, when it is done well, as it is here, represents a whole musical culture. In fact its opening, where Ella states the verse with Flanagan's piano support, is like a musical definition of jazz, salty in its sentiments, wonderfully poignant in its melodic structure, and exquisitely performed. The number is very far removed from a Tin Pan Alley hit like "Teach Me Tonight", but it so happens that it is in these two tracks that one can most conveniently study the deep understanding and musicality lying behind Tommy Flanagan's modest demeanour. As he fills in the interstices between the vocal phrases, his playing is so utterly right that there is even a danger of forgetting for a moment that Ella too contributes to the beauty of such moments by instinctively knowing where to leave the spaces in the first place. Without such command of mental telepathy the best jazz would never exist at all.

Benny Green.

