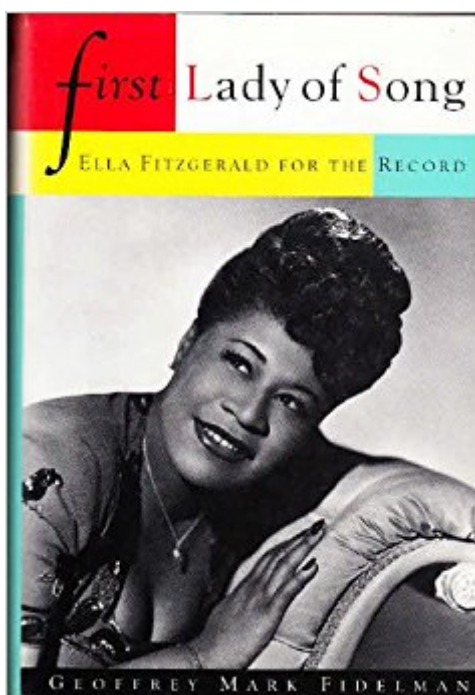


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# First Lady Of Song: Ella Fitzgerald For The Record



## Synopsis

A close-up study of legendary singer Ella Fitzgerald traces her successful musical career and describes the intimate details of her private life, from her battles with recording executives and abusive relatives to the debilitating illnesses from which she has suffered.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this unauthorized biography of legendary singer Ella Fitzgerald, freelance writer Fidelman provides a year-by-year account of her career from her debut at the Apollo Theater in Harlem in 1934 to her 1993 retirement because of failing health. He emphasizes Fitzgerald's complex relationship with Norman Granz, her longtime manager and producer, and her dedication to her art at the expense of her close friendships and health. But like all Fitzgerald biographies, this one suffers from its paucity of personal material, because the singer doesn't grant interviews and her associates are protective of her privacy. Lengthy discussions of her recordings and her stage, radio and TV performances do not make up for this lack as there is little in-depth analysis of her singing style. In addition, Fidelman is addicted to such irritating turns of phrase as "Ella warbled on wax" and "she was scoring a hit almost every time at bat." Appendices listing Fitzgerald's top 10 albums, 100 songs she never recorded, media appearances and a complete discography are included.

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Fitzgerald, who came from a broken home and lived on the streets, won the famous Amateur Night

at the Apollo contest and went on to an unparalleled career. In this labor of love, Fidelman chronicles the singer's scores of best-selling recordings and countless awards and, in later years, her being presented to heads of state and working as spokesperson in commercials for Memorex. Ella loved to sing, but her personal life was not so happy, marked by two failed marriages, estrangement from her adopted son, and only a few close friends. But, despite this not-so-perfect life, Fidelman's Ella can do no wrong. Fidelman lays into any who dare say ill of "Miss Fitz" while endlessly praising her in giddy, awkward prose that might be more at home in a fan club newsletter. Every music collection should have a biography of this remarkable singer, but Stuart Nicholson's *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography* (LJ 5/1/94) remains a clear first choice. Michael Colby, Univ. of California Lib., Davis Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book really tells the story of Ella Fitzgerald. I totally recommend this book to anyone.

Reading this book left me feeling that while the author is passionate about his subject matter, he felt entitled to make snarky comments throughout and who proof read this book? Errors abound. This book was published before Ella's death so it ends paying tribute to her remarkable career more than the subject herself. There are two errors that I know of, one regarding a song and one a television appearance. Dinah! did have Lucille Ball as a guest on a referred episode and was quoted correctly a comment to Ella, but the broadcast featured not Elizabeth Taylor by satellite but Beverly Sills on set, the song "Ordinary Fool" was not recorded by Karen Carpenter for her last album, Karen recorded her version during the "Kind Of Hush" sessions in 1976, Ella recorded hers in 1977, it was impossible for Karen to follow Ella's vocal line as suggested and Ella couldn't follow Karen's because Karen's version wasn't released until 1983. The author credits himself as the writer of the liner notes for Ella's "First Lady Of Song" 3 disc set released by Verve in 1993, I feel this is unnecessary bragging on his part. I've looked for this book for years not understanding why it went out of print until I found it at a book discount shop. It's giddy, self-congratulating, and arrogant. Who is he to refer to Ella as "Miss Fitz?" and the photo section has personal captions not unlike a photo album one would have at home. The one good section is the discography located in the back that contains every recording made including the outtakes.

This alleged biography of Ella Fitzgerald is seriously flawed and not recommended. At its most basic, the book is simply not a serious biography written in a professional manner. For example, the author CONSTANTLY interrupts the narrative to give the reader HIS opinions of each and every

song she sings, her weight and even her wigs. Even the captions to the photos are annoying ("Still hiding her figure for Verve"... "Oh those awful wigs") This is not acceptable or serious writing for a biography. He also seemingly attempts to convince the reader that he knew Ella personally, sometimes referring to her (annoyingly) as "Miss Fitz." Another complaint: the author talks knowingly about live recorded concert albums leading the reader to believe he has some inside knowledge of a concert, when in reality he is simply relating what is on the actual album for everyone to hear. He also refers to others he supposedly interviewed by their first names ("Keeter" Betts, "Danny" Kaye). Was he really on a first name basis with these people? Of course, we don't know who he interviewed, or when he interviewed them, because there aren't any notes in the book to prove it. If you want a serious bio of the great singer, instead of this thing, I recommend the much-respected "Ella Fitzgerald" by Stuart Nicholson.

I must first commend Fidelman for his relatively thorough documenting of Ella's recordings, concerts, and television appearances; if this book is at all worthwhile, it is to learn more about the lady's career. That being said, the author has here penned one of the most unprofessional works of biography ever published. He sets the tone early, recounting the ways he was denied access to Fitzgerald's inner circle with all the righteous, catty anger of the dorky girl excluded from the popular group in middle school. He punctuates various passages with tangents that have little or nothing to do with Fitzgerald's life and legacy, including a plea for record labels to reissue the works of the great stars of the mid-twentieth-century, and mentions of his having written liner notes for certain Fitzgerald releases. The majority of the book's narrative is written in a silly tone which belies any attempt by Fidelman to cast himself as a serious biographer. His insight into Fitzgerald the woman is nil. This is all in addition to his highly questionable and tabloid-esque recounting of a tragic interview with Joe Pass, suffering from terminal cancer, which seems only to be included due to Joe's saying he doesn't know why he's telling Fidelman this - perhaps an attempt by GMF to indicate some sort of personal relationship with the legendary guitarist. I would not go so far as to tell Fitzgerald fans to avoid this book, nor would I send them running to Stuart Nicholson's dull, fact-heavy tome; a compelling, authoritative biography of the great jazz singer has not yet been written. I would instead advise possible readers to approach "First Lady of Song" with very low expectations, and then purely from an informational standpoint.

Ella Fitzgerald is my favorite singer. I think that her best work is outstanding. I wish that this book was too. This is an okay biography of Ella's life and career. The author is clearly a fan and has

some trouble being objective about some of Ella's work (especially her later work in which she had clearly lost a lot of her voice due to illnesses); however, the book gives you a detailed overview of Ella's numerous appearances on television, her performances with Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong, and her extensive recordings. There is another book about Ella by Stuart Nicholson that you may want to read too. It is rather dry in comparison to this book, but I found that by blending Mr. Fidelman's almost-giddy prose with Nicholson's workman-like style, I did come away with a feeling for the woman who Ella was.

I'm a huge Ella fan, but not much is available about her personal life. This is a decent book if you want to know more about Ella's career; in that respect, it's pretty exhaustive and very detailed. I was a little disappointed in the overall quality of the book, however. It has a cheap feel to it, the paper is shoddy, the pictures look as though they were run through a copier, and there are many, many typos and punctuation errors. I also wasn't crazy about the writing style. But for you die-hard Ella fans, I would suggest that you read the book and get what you can out of it.

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