

## Ella Fitzgerald - Sings the Irving Berlin Songbook (1993)

Written by bluesever

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## Ella Fitzgerald - Sings the Irving Berlin Songbook (1993)



Side One: "Let's Face the Music and Dance" – 2:57 "You're Laughing at Me" – 3:18  
"Let Yourself Go" – 2:20 "You Can Have Him" – 3:47 "Russian Lullaby" – 1:55 "Puttin'  
on the Ritz" – 2:18 "Get Thee Behind Me Satan" – 3:49 "Alexander's Ragtime Band" –  
2:43 Side Two: "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails" – 2:36 "How About Me?" –  
3:17 "Cheek to Cheek" – 3:48 "I Used to Be Color Blind" – 2:34 "Lazy" – 2:40 "How  
Deep Is the Ocean?" – 3:11 "All by Myself" – 2:29 "Remember" – 3:26

Side Three:

"Supper Time" – 3:19 "How's Chances?" – 2:48 "Heat Wave" – 2:25 "Isn't This a  
Lovely Day?" – 3:29 "You Keep Coming Back Like a Song" – 3:35 "Reaching for the  
Moon" – 2:18 "Slumming on Park Avenue" – 2:24

Side Four:

"The Song is Ended (but the Melody Lingers On)" (lyrics by Beda Loehner) – 2:30 "I'm  
Putting All My Eggs in One Basket" – 3:01 "Now it Can Be Told" – 3:12 "Always" – 3:09  
"It's a Lovely Day Today" – 2:28 "Change Partners" – 3:18 "No Strings (I'm Fancy Free)"  
– 3:03 "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm" – 3:00 "Blue Skies" – 3:43 (Note: This track  
was added to later vinyl re-issues)

Personnel Ella Fitzgerald - vocals Paul Weston – arranger, conductor

It's impossible to rank the records in Ella Fitzgerald's songbook series, but the 1958 Irving Berlin collection is surely essential in any music library. This Verve reissue packages the two CDs beautifully and includes the original liner notes by Nat Hentoff, as well as a new essay by James Gavin. But more than any essay could, Ella captures the essence of Berlin's contribution to American popular music, backed by Paul Weston's marvelous orchestra. Some of the players include Harry "Sweets" Edison, Juan Tizol, Barney Kessel, and Ted Nash, uncle of the young saxophonist of Jazz Composers Collective and Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra fame.

Berlin's 1911 breakthrough hit, "Alexander's Ragtime Band," gets a quasi-comic treatment. Fitzgerald exaggerates syllables, evoking the song's inherent joyousness, and scats a

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call-and-response verse with a rich-sounding trombone section. Other ultra-popular titles include "Puttin' on the Ritz," "How Deep Is the Ocean," and "Blue Skies," the last of which appears as a previously unreleased bonus track with a smoking scat break. (Ella also scats briefly on "The Song Is Ended" and "No Strings.") "Top Hat, White Tie, and Tails" has one of Berlin's most surprising bridges, both lyrically and melodically. In a series of tricky descending arpeggios, Ella flawlessly enunciates the following mouthful: "I'm steppin' out my dear to breathe an atmosphere that simply reeks with class/ And I trust that you'll excuse my dust when I step on the gas." On a more somber note, Berlin's classic but lesser known "Supper Time" (originally sung by Ethel Waters) concerns a woman's reaction to news of her husband's lynching. Berlin's willingness to tackle such an unpleasant subject complicates his image as a broker of patriotic sentiment, most obviously with the blockbuster "God Bless America."

Several of the songs on this reissue appeared as duets on Ella's albums with Louis Armstrong, including "Cheek to Cheek," "Isn't This a Lovely Day," "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket," and "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm." The arrangements here are quite different, providing added insight into Fitzgerald's interpretive abilities. In addition, Weston surprises the listener with a minimalistic approach on "Russian Lullaby" and "Reaching for the Moon." The former pairs viola and harp as a dramatic backdrop for Ella's voice, and the latter does the same with viola and Barney Kessel's beautiful, almost folk-like guitar.

In the end, Ella Fitzgerald's talent speaks for itself, as does Berlin's. The compatibility of these two American legends is unmistakable on this pristine-sounding reissue. ---David Adler, [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)

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