

## Ella Fitzgerald

1917-1996



Ella Fitzgerald was one of the most popular jazz vocalists of all-time. From her first recordings with the Chick Webb Orchestra to her last performances in the early 1990s she thrilled and impressed audiences around the world with her vocal talents. She was also instrumental in developing the style of singing known as "**scat**" and over the years worked with some of the most famous names in show business, earning the nickname "**First Lady of Song.**"

Fitzgerald was born in 1917 in Newport News, Virginia. Her father and mother separated soon after her birth, and she and her mother moved to Yonkers, New York. Her mother soon died in a car wreck

and Fitzgerald had difficulty coping with the changes in her life. Her grades in school fell, and she began to get into trouble with the law. She was eventually sent to a reform school but soon escaped and went out on her own.



When she was young, Fitzgerald had enjoyed singing and dancing. In 1934 she entered an amateur night contest at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Her vocal talents impressed saxophonist and future jazz great Benny Carter, who was in the audience. Benny Carter put her in his band (even at her young age) and he and his wife adopted her.



Proving to be the star attraction of the jazz orchestra, Fitzgerald recorded dozens of songs with the group, including the wildly popular, "A-Tisket, A-Tasket," a tune for which she wrote the lyrics.

She had **perfect pitch** and a **three octave vocal range**. She brought singing and vocal control to a **virtuoso** level. She was clearly both one of the most talented American vocalists ever to perform, and one of the most popular voices in American history.

During the rest of the 1940s and 1950s she toured with various bands and with a combo led by her husband, Ray Brown. She remained extremely popular throughout her career and recorded regularly through the 1950s and 1960s. She also

appeared many times on television and continued to perform up until the mid-1980s when her health began to fail.

In 1986 Fitzgerald underwent heart surgery and was diagnosed with diabetes. She refused to slow down, despite her condition, and continued to maintain a busy performing schedule. This took a further toll on her health. In the early 1990s she was forced to have her lower legs amputated. She rarely performed thereafter. Ella Fitzgerald passed away in 1996.

Over a recording career that lasted 59 years, she was the winner of 13 Grammy Awards and was awarded the National medal of Art by Ronald Reagan and the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George H. W. Bush.

*(Answer in Complete sentences)*

1. Describe Ella's singing voice.
2. What is perfect pitch?
3. What is her most famous song?
4. What was Ella's nickname?
5. What is "scat" singing?