

Ella!

Friday, February 19
11 a.m.–12 p.m. ET
Grades 7–12



Curriculum Connections: American History, Language Arts
National Standards for Music: 6, 7, 9

About the Program

At the performance, award-winning performers Roberta Gambarini and Janis Siegal will pay tribute to Ella Fitzgerald and explore some of the defining features of Ella’s singing and her influence on singers of today. They’ll also perform some favorites from Ella’s repertoire.

About the Performers

Italian-born vocalist **Roberta Gambarini** started performing in her teens and has sung at venues and festivals around the world. She has an instrumental approach to her singing and possesses a warm timbre, impeccable timing and intonation, and scatting and improvisation skills. Gambarini is the winner of the 1998 Thelonious Monk Jazz Competition and was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2006 and 2009.



Grammy-winning artist **Janis Siegal** sings both solo and as part of The Manhattan Transfer. She’s recorded in different genres, including jazz, pop, spoken word, and musical theater. Siegal has performed in several concert tributes to her idol, Ella Fitzgerald.

The Dizzy Gillespie™ All-Star Big Band, a veritable who’s who among jazz musicians, was formed in the summer of 1998 to perform Dizzy Gillespie’s classic big band repertoire and continue the legacy left by the late master. The band includes many Gillespie alumni including James Moody, Frank Wess, Jimmy Heath, Paquito D`Rivera, Roy Hargrove, Antonio Hart, Claudio Roditi, Douglas Purviance and the band’s Executive Director, John Lee, Dizzy’s longtime bassist. Members performing in the *Ella!* program are **Antonio Hart** on sax, **Gregory Gisbert** on flugelhorn and trumpet, **Cyrus Chestnut** on piano, **Willie Jones III** on drums, **Yotam Silberstein** on guitar and bassist **John Lee**.

Meet Ella Fitzgerald

Ella Fitzgerald (1917–1996) wowed audiences for six decades with her pure, three-octave vocal range and versatile singing style. She recorded more than 200 albums and sold more than 40 million records.

Born in Virginia, Ella moved to New York City as a young child. As a teenager, she started entering talent contests, eventually winning a chance to dance at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem. On stage and stricken with stage fright, the shy Ella changed plans, and instead sang. Her sweet voice brought the audience to its feet. She won first place.

Soon after, Ella gained popularity as the vocalist for bandleader Chick Webb’s band, and she recorded her first number 1 hit, “A-Tisket, A-Tasket.” In the 1950s her jazz-inflected covers of the songs of great American songwriters helped firmly establish Ella as one of the most popular female jazz singers in the United States.

Ella helped popularize jazz to a wider audience, and her artistry transcended boundaries of race and musical style in its universal appeal. Furthermore, it inspired generations of vocalists to raise their voices with creativity and heartfelt charm.

Did You Know?

Jazz singing developed in the early twentieth century, largely pioneered by Louis Armstrong, who introduced improvisation and “scatting,” a singing style where nonsense syllables are used instead of words, and the voice is used much like a musical instrument. As record players became widespread among listeners, talented jazz singers gained popularity and became celebrities, including many female singers. Ella Fitzgerald was among the most popular.

Talented singers work very hard at their craft, practicing, performing, and most important of all, listening to other singers. For example, Ella Fitzgerald got her start by listening to, and imitating the style of, her favorite singer, Connee Boswell.

From the turn of the last century through today, popular songs have been repeatedly adapted and reinterpreted by creative jazz musicians and singers like Ella Fitzgerald. The “Great American Songbook” is filled with these songs, or “standards,” that have become a permanent part of the jazz and pop music repertoire. These classic songs allow for artistic freedom and interpretation, while retaining core elements such as melody and lyrics.

Timeline: Ella Fitzgerald

- 1917** April 25th—Born Ella Jane Fitzgerald in Virginia to William and Temperance Fitzgerald
- 1934** Wins an amateur contest sponsored by the Apollo Theatre, New York
- 1935** Begins performing with the Chick Webb band
- 1936** First recording, “Love and Kisses,” released on the Decca Label
- 1938** First number one song “A-tisket, A-tasket”
- 1954** Best female vocalist, *Metronome* magazine and *Down Beat* magazine
- 1958** At first Grammy Awards, wins best female vocal performance and best individual jazz performance
- 1959** Wins Grammys for best female vocal performance and best individual jazz performance
- 1960** Wins Grammys for best female vocal performance (single) and best female vocal performance (album)
- 1962** Wins best female solo vocal performance Grammy
- 1965** Wins first ASCAP award in recognition of an artist
- 1967** Grammy award; Bing Crosby Lifetime Achievement Award
- 1979** Grammy award; receives Kennedy Center Honors
- 1980** Grammy award; receives Honorary Doctor of Music from Howard University
- 1981** Grammy award
- 1983** Peabody award for Outstanding Contributions to Music in America; Grammy award
- 1987** Receives UCLA Medal for Musical Achievements and a National Medal of Arts
- 1988** Receives NAACP image award for Lifetime Achievement
- 1992** December— Final performance in Palm Beach, Florida
- 1996** June 15—Fitzgerald dies in Beverley Hills, CA

“I sing like I feel.”
—Ella Fitzgerald

“I never knew how good our songs were until I heard Ella Fitzgerald sing them.”
—Ira Gershwin, lyricist

“Jazz is America’s Classical Music. It is an American way of creating music.”
—Dr. Billy Taylor

Talking Jazz

- ♪ **a cappella**—singing with no musical accompaniment
- ♪ **improvisation**—creating music or song spontaneously
- ♪ **syncopation**—emphasizing a normally weak beat in a musical rhythm
- ♪ **vocal range**—the pitches a singer can perform comfortably, from the lowest note to the highest
- ♪ **vocalese**—the setting of lyrics to established jazz orchestral instruments
- ♪ **scatting** — Jazz singing in which improvised, meaningless syllables are sung to a melody



What is Jazz? By Dr. Billy Taylor

Jazz is America's Classical Music. No other indigenous American music reflects so clearly the American ideal of the individual's right to personal freedom of expression. In many ways, jazz is a metaphor for the American ideal of democracy.

As a musical language, jazz has developed steadily from a single expression of the consciousness of African Americans to a national music that expresses who we are as Americans. It also serves as a musical mirror, reflecting how we as Americans have seen ourselves at different times in our history. As a classical music with its own standards of form, complexity, literacy, and excellence, jazz has been a major influence on music all around the world for more than a century.

Over time, the various styles of jazz have musically articulated contemporary American feelings and thoughts. These various jazz styles have distinct musical elements, which have often evolved out of informal improvisation and are later reflected in written music, sound recordings, movies, and other visual and audio reproductions. Throughout the history of jazz, the music has embodied formal elegance, simplicity, dignity, and correctness of style, with lucid conception and order.

Jazz is an American way of creating music. It is a uniquely American phenomenon that defines the American national character and culture.

Instructional Activities

Listen/Reflect

- ♪ During the program listen for examples of a **cappella** singing, **improvisation**, and **syncopation**. How do these techniques affect the mood of the music?
- ♪ During the program listen closely to the original clips of Ella Fitzgerald. Compare and contrast Fitzgerald's style to the style of Gambarini and Siegel.



Research/History

- ♪ Ella Fitzgerald's career spanned over five decades. Research the phases that Jazz music went through during this time period (1940-1990). What qualities in Fitzgerald's music allowed her to remain popular as jazz evolved?
- ♪ Re-interpreting jazz standards was an important part of Fitzgerald's career. In groups choose a song considered to be a jazz standard. Find and listen to different versions of the song. Identify similarities and differences in the performances. Then find another song that has been re-interpreted by multiple artists, one not considered a jazz standard, and compare different versions. How did each artist put his or her mark on the song?
- ♪ Ella Fitzgerald was an extremely influential jazz singer. Identify and research a musician or artist who was influenced by Fitzgerald. How is his or her work similar and different to Fitzgerald's?

Resources

Internet Resources:

Smithsonian Jazz Class—Ella Fitzgerald: http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef_match.asp

Interview with Dr. Billy Taylor: <http://www.artsedge.org/content/3295/>

NPR Jazz Profile: Ella Fitzgerald: http://www.npr.org/programs/jazzprofiles/archive/fitzgerald_e.html

Select Recordings:

Chick Webb and his Orchestra featuring Ella Fitzgerald. Folkways Recordings, 1981.

Ella Fitzgerald - Live at Montreux 1969. Eagle Rock Entertainment, 2005. DVD.