

UNEARTHED GEM



The Moment of Truth: Ella at The Coliseum
Ella Fitzgerald (Verve)
 by Marilyn Lester

During the summer of 1967, Ella Fitzgerald (born 108 years ago this month on Apr. 25) was mid-tour with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. This appearance, recorded at L.A.'s Coliseum, was never released until now, when the 4-track tapes from Verve Records founder Norman Granz' private collection were remastered and presented as *The Moment of Truth: Ella at The Coliseum*. The nine tracks are eclectic, and well-represent all aspects of the singer's greatness. But those expecting the Ellington presence, won't find it; at the piano is Fitzgerald's music director, Jimmy Jones, with Bob Cranshaw (bass) and now iconic DEO members Paul Gonsalves (tenor), Jimmy Hamilton (clarinet, tenor), Johnny Hodges and Russell Procope (altos), Harry Carney (baritone), Cat Anderson and Cootie Williams (trumpets) and Sam Woodyard (drums).

The album's title track opener presents Fitzgerald swinging full bore. The tune is a footnote in the diva's

band book but demonstrates how Fitzgerald could elevate even a second-rate number with her energy, exquisite phrasing, authenticity and ability to be in the moment at any given time. As *The Moment of Truth* progresses, a window into Fitzgerald's love of her audiences is opened. She is humble but also quick with an ad lib, wickedly witty, engaging and always charming. During one of the few standards on the release, "Bye Bye Blackbird", an audience member offers her a drink; she's quick to respond with "I don't dare drink, somebody might think that I'm Dean Martin's sister!" Fitzgerald was also known for her spontaneity in creating lyrics or inserting comments on the spot. On Cole Porter's "Let's Do It", she adds her own cast of characters to the tune's multiple choruses, referencing pop culture celebrities of the day: The Beatles, Sonny and Cher, Richard (Burton) and Elizabeth (Taylor) and James Bond 007. Her depth on "You've Changed" is striking as she mines the lyric's sadness via keen vocal modulation and phrasing. She ends with a stunner, an extended, high, keening spotlight on the word "changed." As for scat, Fitzgerald was non pareil. On the only Ellington material to be found on the release, "In a Mellow Tone", she scats the second chorus with her famous improvisations, pulling out all the stops and soaring into the stratosphere.

The closer could only be "Mack the Knife", one of her biggest hits. Who else could transform Kurt Weill's slinky, sinister song into a jazz barn-burner without losing a moment of its darkness.

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NOW!
Marek Pospieszalski Octet (featuring Zoh Amba)
(Instant Classic)
 by Ken Waxman

While Tennessee-born tenor saxophonist Zoh Amba may be the most familiar name on this choice release, the expanding skills of Marek Pospieszalski and his Polish octet is the main attraction. Pospieszalski, who plays soprano and tenor saxophones, clarinet and flute here, and who composed all six tracks of *NOW!*, has for more than a decade collaborated with international players and led different ensembles. The octet, which in the past has recorded themes from contemporary Polish composers and the leader's own compositions, is his favored configuration.

It's a tribute to Amba that her unbridled playing fits snugly within the band filled out by Tomasz Dąbrowski (trumpet), Piotr Chęcki (tenor, baritone), Grzegorz Tarwid (piano), Tomasz Sroczyński (viola), Szymon Mikam (guitar), Max Mucha (bass) and Qba Janicki (drums). Still, it's Tarwid's dynamic and repetitive keyboard vamp that's especially prominent during the 14+ minutes of pure energy that's the introductory title track. Driven by piano pressure and equally powerful drum raps, the tune snakes through several sections that alternate triple-tonguing, tone-shredding altissimo

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