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Now at TPAC, ELLA's Tina Fabrique provides intimate look at First Lady of Song

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This Examiner Rates Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend:



Tina Fabrique brings Ella Fitzgerald's music and personal history to the stage in *Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend*, now playing TPAC
Photo: TPAC/Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend

Video: Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend



Tina Fabrique stars as Ella Fitzgerald in the jukebox musical, *Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend*

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From the moment Tina Fabrique walks on stage as the star of *Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend*, currently playing through Sunday at Nashville's TPAC (Tennessee Performing Arts Center), she embodies the legendary *First Lady of Song* perfectly. Not only does Fabrique physically resemble Fitzgerald, but add to that, a very Ella mid-60s updo hairstyle, complete with curled bangs, and she's got the look down pat. But that's just *Ella* on the surface. Fabrique goes much further in bringing the legendary singer to life with a voice to match, and I'm not just talking her singing voice.

Much like the original's three-octave, 13 Grammy-winning, pitch-perfect singing voice, Ella Fitzgerald also had a very melodic way of speaking. Being a huge Ella fan myself, I've watched endless interviews by way of Youtube and have always been mesmerized by her melodic way of speaking. In a single spoken phrase, she would seemingly float from an excitable higher pitch to a soothing full tone ensuring her captive audience listened to every word.

Fabrique captures that trait as she shares some of the legendary songbird's private history. As *Ella* admits in the contest of the musical itself, she was thought of as *the nice one*, with most of her real-life history buried in order to present a certain personal for her audience. *Ella*, the musical manages to reveal hidden truths without ever tarnishing the icon's reputation or larger than life persona.

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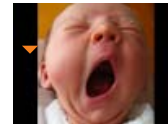


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During the course of the play, which takes place in 1966 as *Ella* is rehearsing for a concert in France, at the urging of her longtime manager *Norman Ganz* (Harold Dixon), she goes over stories from her past in an effort to choose some patter to share during her concert. Basically, *Ella* thinks out loud, and in doing so, shares everything from an abusive childhood, a seedy job as a street dancer outside a strip club and her first appearances at the famed Apollo Theatre in Harlem to failed marriages, death of loved ones, family secrets and ultimately, success as one of the most impressive singers the world has ever known.

Aside from Fabrique and Dixon, the cast consists of *Ella's* backing band: pianist George Caldwell, percussionist Rodney Harper, Trumpeter Ron Haynes, who does a mean *Louis Armstrong* impression and Bassist Clifton Kellern. At one time or another during the course of the show, each of the band members take on temporary roles as various men from *Ella's* past, but it's their outstanding musicianship that wows the crowd.

With only one costume change and a very minimal beaded curtain backdrop, *Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend* doesn't rely on big production numbers, needless choreography, special effects and outlandish sets. It doesn't need to. Instead, the audience is treated to 23 finger snappin', toe tappin', standing ovation-inspiring renditions of some of Ella's biggest hits. Along the way, there are also a few lovely surprises and a music history lesson of the life behind an icon. For a sneak peek at some of the show's musical highlights, [CLICK](#) on the video link to the left of this article.

Of the classic songs included in the show, all the legendary composers of the day are represented. There are five Gershwin tunes, including my personal favorites, 'S Wonderful and *Let's Call The Whole Thing Off*. Irvin Berlin is represented with *Cheek to Cheek* and *Blue Skies*. If I named each of the show's highlights, I'd basically be listing all 23 songs featured in the show. The show ends with Gershwin's *Oh, Lady Be Good*, and suffice it to say, with Tina Fabrique in the role of iconic chanteuse Ella Fitzgerald, she certainly is.

Ella: The Lady Behind The Legend continues its run at TPAC with evening performances Friday and Saturday, March 4 and 5 at 8pm, a Saturday matinee at 2pm and a Sunday matinee at 1pm on March 6. For tickets and more information about the show, [CLICK HERE](#). Following its Nashville engagement, the tour continues March 22-27 in Philadelphia, PA. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the show's official site.

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