

## Song Birds

Great singers need to sing in front of audiences. They can get it letter-perfect in the studio, improving on successive takes—and removing audio blemishes or dropping in edits via the engineer's hand—but singers worthy of the title are trained to perform, eager to show what they can do. Two new discs offer vital live performances by a pair of the greatest jazz singers ever, giving listeners a chance to compare their respective gifts.

**Ella Fitzgerald's** live sets from Jazz at the Philharmonic established her as something other than the pop and novelty song mill of her Decca recordings. The legendary 1949 Carnegie Hall sides cast her as a great improviser with world-class scat ability and a grasp of bebop. **Jazz At The Philharmonic: The Ella Fitzgerald Set (Verve 24612-01; 60:05 ★★★★★)** shows a vocal innovator worthy of standing toe-to-toe with the big boys on the tour (Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Roy Eldridge, Flip Phillips and others). Much of this material has been released over the years, but this is the most complete grouping of the Carnegie material and a 1954 JATP set from Hartford, Connecticut.

She's a young woman in '49, almost giddy with the musical possibilities before her—in the songs and the interaction with Hank Jones on piano, then-husband Ray Brown on bass and Buddy Rich on drums. She swings at all tempos, but the spontaneous invention displayed on "Old Mother Hubbard" is awe-inspiring.

Though never an effective blues singer, Fitzgerald invests credible blues feeling into "Black Coffee" and "Why Don't You Do Right." And while deeply emotional ballads weren't her strong suit, the rarity "Bill" and a touching "The Man That Got Away" presages her best songbook efforts for Granz. She impressively mixes pop, bebop, r&b and swing on Tiny Bradshaw's "Later," all the while swinging joyously.

Ordering info: [vervemusicgroup.com](http://vervemusicgroup.com)

**Sarah Vaughan** is heard with her 1978 road trio of pianist Carl Schroeder, bassist Walter Booker and drummer Jimmy Cobb at a New Orleans nightclub. This previously unreleased set, **Live At Rosy's (Resonance 2017; 38:45/44:58 ★★★★★½)**, is a stunning document, originally recorded for the National Public Radio-syndicated radio program *Jazz Alive* with host Dr. Billy Taylor, some of which has never been aired before.

Vaughan is playful, though some of her sharper asides fly under audience radar. After introducing the bearded Schroeder as "Abe," for example, she clarifies: "He freed us, fool!"



Ella Fitzgerald

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

A ludicrous request for "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" nudges her competitive nature, so she gamely tears off a quick romp. A fast, scatted "Sarah's Blues" shows she could comfortably rifle off hornlike improvisations with the band—even moving up half steps—and stay in tune.

Sarah's set piece of the period, "Send In The Clowns," is among her greatest live offerings on record. She flies her gossamer falsetto off the trapeze, with Schroeder to catch her every time. The purity of her held notes ("losing my timing this late in myyyyy career") conjures chapels and cathedrals. Such a capacity for understated drama was a hole card that Fitzgerald was never dealt.

If Vaughan was a well-oiled precision instrument on the first disc, she can be a little too loose on disc two. The set is marbled with her ever-more-daring redesigns of songs—from "The Man I Love" to the '70s favorite "Everything Must Change." She can seemingly do anything that comes to mind: navigate any rhythm, calibrate her vibrato at will, inject any amount of melisma to a word, jump octaves while scattling, scat effortlessly, gliss up the scale and drop down into her mahogany chest tones in a heartbeat.

But her superlative instrument and her sure-footedness bring out her Baroque excesses: letting the vibrato wave, phrasing so far behind the beat, slurring her melisma and devaluing the lyrics in favor of her gymnastics. Even at that, it's a magnificent recording.

DB

Ordering info: [resonancerecords.org](http://resonancerecords.org)



# NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL®

PRESENTED BY NATIXIS GLOBAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

JULY 29 - 31, 2016

CHICK COREA  
CHARLES LLOYD  
SCOFIELD/LOVANO  
DAVE LIEBMAN  
KENNY BARRON  
& MANY MORE



[NEWPORTJAZZFEST.ORG](http://NEWPORTJAZZFEST.ORG)



ALEX AND ANI



Newport Jazz Festival® is a production of Newport Festivals Foundation, Inc.™ a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, duly licensed.