

ELLA

Book by Jeffrey Hatcher

Conceived by Rob Ruggiero and Dyke Garrison

Presented by Virginia Stage Company

Mar. 31 – Apr. 19

For tickets call: 757-627-1234

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

As you enter the grandiose Wells Theatre there is Michael Schweikardt's elegant, sophisticated set. It catches your eye like that mysterious something that soared over Hampton Roads a few nights ago. You know from that moment on that you are in for something high falutin", something from those by gone days of Café Society. And you are not disappointed.

Starring Tina Fabrique as Ella Fitzgerald, this non-stop electrifying musical tells the story of one of the greatest jazz and pop vocalists of the 20th century. She's backed up by a four piece band of musician/actors (they are members of Actor's Equity) that are a show unto themselves. They interact at various times with Miss Fabrique. For instance, Thad Wilson becomes Louis Armstrong when he's not bringing down the house with his white hot trumpet.

But, it's Tina Fabrique who magically becomes Ella Fitzgerald that I want to tell you about. She doesn't do an impersonation. Her creation is a rebirth of the great singer who goes from a "chunky thing" at sixteen to become an international star. She sang with everybody from Sinatra to Joan Sutherland. Ella had a range of three octaves and I think Madame Fabrique does as well. She does selections from numerous American Songbooks including Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin and many others. She has tender, delicate notes for such tunes as "Our Love is Here to Stay" and rattles the chandeliers and shakes your very seat with a knock down drag out rendition of "That Old Black Magic". And then, there's her scat singing. Ella was acclaimed queen of scat. Scat began at the turn of the century or earlier with Jelly Roll Morton. Even Al Jolson did a little scat. No, Ella didn't invent it but she took the form to its zenith. Tina Fabrique does likewise. I keep wondering what DNA testing might reveal about Tine and Ella.

This show was conceived by Rob Ruggiero and Dyke Garrison with a book written by Jeffrey Hatcher. Ruggiero also directed this beautifully orchestrated production that grows with dramatic build to its conclusion. In addition to Thad Wilson, the other high flying musician/actors are George Caldwell, piano/conductor, Rodney Harper on drums and Clifton Kellem on bass.

John Lassiter's lighting does a lot to create a special, elite space for this jewel box musical called "Ella". I've already used lots of words that begin with an "e" and "l" to tell you about it. I might add elevating and elating. Whatever, it's one 'ellauvah show!

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.