

**Ella Fitzgerald:
syllabic choice in scat singing and
her timbral syllabic development
between 1944 and 1947**

**By
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It is common in jazz discourse to praise Ella Fitzgerald as the greatest vocal improviser in the music's history – Ella in fact declared herself to be exactly that¹ - and this is part of the commonly accepted vocal jazz historical narrative. Improvisational methods praise her ideas as “excellent models for students of vocal jazz”² and “musically and verbally inventive, filled with the joy of her creativity... represent[ing] the essence and pinnacle of scat singing”³; critical commentaries praise her “perfect balance between a steam enginelike propulsion and an ethereal playfulness”⁴; and reference books mention Fitzgerald as an exemplar of scat singing in definitions of the term⁵, using phrases like “It is mostly closely associated by the general public with Ella Fitzgerald and her many imitators.”⁶ Ella's influence on other singers is illuminated in Chip Deffaa's profile from *Jazz Veterans: A Portrait Gallery*⁷, written shortly before her death in 1996: “No living singer is more respected by other singers.” Deffaa quotes – among others – Annie Ross (“Like Charlie Parker, Ella can think it and execute it.”⁸), Jon Hendricks (“Ella's a one-in-a-lifetime.”⁹), Anita O'Day (“The first time I heard Ella, in 1937, I said, ‘That is the girl.

¹ Friedwald, *Jazz Singing: America's Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond*, 282.

² Madura, *Getting Started with Vocal Improvisation*, 29.

³ Stoloff, *Scat! Vocal Improvisation Techniques*, 8.

⁴ Holden, “Ella Fitzgerald's Playfulness Ripens with Time's Passage.” This citation refers to the reprint in Gourse, *Ella Fitzgerald: Seven Decades of Commentary*, 162.

⁵ *The New College Encyclopedia of Music* defines scat singing as a “jazz term for the use of nonsense syllables and other wordless effects in the course of a vocal number. The technique has been employed in a rapid and virtuoso way by Ella Fitzgerald amongst others.” *The new Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines scat singing as “A jazz solo of vocal nonsense syllables... Scat came to be represented by virtuosic interpretations (by, e.g. Ella Fitzgerald) of rapid bebop instrumental improvisation.”

⁶ Carr, Fairweather, and Priestly, *Jazz: The Rough Guide*, 887.

⁷ Originally published in 1996; subsequent citations of this article will refer to the reprint in Gourse, *Ella Fitzgerald, Seven Decades of Commentary*, 162-166.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

That's the champion – the Queen of Jazz.”¹⁰), Ruth Brown (“Once you've heard Ella, you've heard the best – why mess with the rest?”¹¹), and Cassandra Wilson (“Ella is the quintessential vocal musician.”¹²).

While much has been written about Fitzgerald's melodic and harmonic improvisational approach, very little has been written about her syllabic approach to scat singing. In fact, very little has been written about anyone's syllabic approach to scat singing. William R. Bauer's “Scat Singing: A Timbral and Phonemic Analysis” explores vocables in Louis Armstrong's “Heebie Jeebies” and “Hotter Than That” solos, along with Betty Carter's “Babe's Blues” solo;¹³ Bauer does briefly mention Fitzgerald in reference to Ella's “...mimic[ing] the tonguing, phrasing, and articulation of instrumentalists”¹⁴ and in Betty Carter's early recordings being “peppered with... vocal licks out of Fitzgerald's vocabulary such as the rapid alteration of syllables that start with /n/ and /d/.”¹⁵

One of the few somewhat in-depth commentaries regarding Fitzgerald's syllabic choices appears in Dom Cerulli's “Ella... The Jazz Horn”, featured in the liner notes to the compilation album *The Best of Decca*.¹⁶ Cerulli discusses her syllabic choices in the following two excerpts: “It seems, too, in the syllables she uses for improvising, she chooses the ones most easily adaptable to the flow of a tenor sax.”¹⁷; and “She adopts many of the phrasing devices of the tenor. There are many times when she will take a word like in and sing it i-hin”; or and will emerge “a-ha-hand”; and she will have improvised within the word or a vowel, in the chord, and

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ This article first appeared in *Current Musicology*, Spring 2001/02, 303-323.

¹⁴ Bauer, “Scat Singing: A Timbral and Phonemic Analysis”, 303-323.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Reprinted in Gourse, *Ella Fitzgerald: Seven Decades of Commentary*, 41-42.

¹⁷ Gourse, *Ella Fitzgerald: Seven Decades of Commentary*, 42.

with the mannerisms of a tenor.”¹⁸ Stuart Nicholson referenced the influence of instrumental improvisation in Fitzgerald’s styling in the following commentary: “From start to finish her conception is purely instrumental, just like a trumpet or a saxophone ‘blowing’ through the blues changes.”¹⁹ Nicholson also references the “set riffs” that were common in many of her improvisations: “Her ‘set riffs’ would remain common to every performance of the song she gave for almost fifty years; they represented the building blocks around which she would construct her improvisation. This was a factor common to all her scat features.”²⁰ Nicholson’s commentary, unfortunately, does not provide any guidance to what these “set riffs” were in terms of melodic, harmonic, and syllabic content.

Characteristic of the way the popular press wrote about Fitzgerald’s scat singing in her heyday is a 1964 *Time* magazine article (“She Who Is Ella”) that includes the following passage: “Just when you think she might be turning into Bonnie Baker, however, she kicks the lid off and begins to scat: ‘Scoodee-oo-da-do-dee-uba-ty-ty-ta-roo.’ She is the chair professor of the art of scat singing, wherein a singer abandons comprehensible lyrics in the middle of a song, and she can scoodee-oo-da for 800 bars without running out of fresh gibberish... Then suddenly she turns to a robust fragment of ‘Did You Ever See a Dream Walking,’ only to return quickly to the riverbed of perickety-bip-delip-deluda-bry-bry-kanoo.”²¹ Only the most generous analysis might

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Jazz*, 139-140.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ This piece was unsigned, in an example of the “group journalism” practiced by news magazines of the time. This citation refers to the reprint in Gourse, *Ella Fitzgerald: Seven Decades of Commentary*, 75-76.

consider these combinations to bear a passing resemblance to Fitzgerald's actual improvisational syllabic vocabulary.²²

I do not make the preceding statement lightly, as I authored one of the few published analytical studies of Ella Fitzgerald's improvisational²³, one in which I examined Fitzgerald's complete live solo (both melodic and syllabic material) on "Oh, Lady Be Good"²⁴ from Verve Records' compilation album *The Essential Ella Fitzgerald: The Great Songs*²⁵, reviewing all 525 scat syllables used by Fitzgerald during the course of the solo, identifying 69 unique syllables and grouping them into four categories, along with identifying combinations used on triplet figures^{26,27}.

Looking back on my own (well-intentioned) writing, I am embarrassed to realize how quickly I jumped to conclusions based on limited analysis. Like Gunther Schuller in his opus "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation,"²⁸ I made an error in drawing

²² Gourse, in an editor's note preceding the article, praises *Time's* "excellent jazz coverage" and deems the article a "witty piece effectively describing Ella's scat singing style." Gourse also speculates about "the identity of the well-informed jazz lover (or lovers) who wrote this story."

²³ Spradling asked me to write the section of the book dealing with vocal improvisation, which was published in Part Three as "The Art and Craft of Scat Singing and Melodic Alteration." Subsequent citations will refer to Spradling, *Jazz Singing: Developing Artistry and Authenticity*, 77-131, and particularly 79-89.

²⁴ Spradling, *Jazz Singing: Developing Artistry and Authenticity*, 83-89.

²⁵ This is not the most well-known Ella solo on "Lady Be Good"; the one with which most jazz listeners are familiar is the March 18, 1947 Decca Records studio recording featuring Bob Haggart and His Orchestra. This live Jazz at the Philharmonic recording was made on October 7, 1957.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷ These distinctions were assigned solely by arbitrary endpoints based on the number of times a specific syllable was used in the solo.

²⁸ Schuller, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation." The article has been reprinted many times, including Walser, *Keeping Time*, 212-222.

large-scale conclusions from analysis of one particular solo.²⁹ While I do certainly feel that the recording I chose is certainly a fine representation of Ella's improvisational style, it is exactly that and nothing more: a fine representation, not an exemplar. In writing "The Art and Craft of Scat Singing and Melodic Alteration," I then compounded this error through writing similar analyses of "representative solos" from Mel Tormé³⁰, Sarah Vaughan³¹, Betty Carter³², Mark Murphy³³, and Bobby McFerrin³⁴, then drawing a series of ten general conclusions about scat singing from these solos³⁵, stating in regard to scat syllables: "An analysis of these solos shows that the most common scat syllables are: Ah, Ba, Bi, Bop, Bu, Da, Dat, Di, Dl, Dn, Do, Dow, Du, Ee, Oo, Wa, and Ya; they are used in interchangeable combinations with each other... Although these are not the only syllables used, they are historically the most common."^{36,37}

While my final analysis may be generally correct, it suffers from small sample size bias. Additionally, my analysis managed to miss a fairly obvious point. In writing about "Shulie a Bop," I stated that "... 'Shulie a Bop' contains many elements that are similar to Ella's scatting..."³⁸ This statement – though applied only to Sarah Vaughan – could have been written regarding any of the analyzed solos.

²⁹ An in-depth analysis of the flaws in Schuller's thesis can be found in Givan, "Gunther Schuller and the Challenge of Sonny Rollins: Stylistic Context, Intentionality, and Jazz Analysis," 167-237.

³⁰ Spradling, *Jazz Singing: Developing Artistry and Authenticity*, 91-102. "Route 66" (*Live at the Maisonette*, Atlantic, 1975)

³¹ Ibid., 103-107. "Shulie a Bop" (*Sarah Vaughan*, Verve, 1954).

³² Ibid., 109-114. "Frenesi" (*Meet Betty Carter and Ray Bryant*, Columbia, 1955).

³³ Ibid., 115-120. "Effendi" (*Beauty and the Beast*, Muse, 1985).

³⁴ Ibid., 121-128. "Moondance" (*Bobby McFerrin*, Elektra, 1982),

³⁵ Ibid., 129-131.

³⁶ Ibid., 130.

³⁷ An additional methodological error I made in the entirety of this study was a lack of consistency in the way I labeled the various syllables, particularly regarding vowel behaviors.

³⁸ Spradling, *Jazz Singing: Developing Artistry and Authenticity*, 104.

In light of both the esteem with which both Fitzgerald's peers and the next generation of jazz singers held her, and the lack of analysis dedicated to the syllabic content of her scat solos, it seems worth revisiting the development of Ella's style as a scat singer, as documented through several recordings she made on Decca Records in the mid-1940s. These recordings are not always held in critical esteem³⁹, but a closer examination reveals that it was during this period that Fitzgerald established much of the melodic and harmonic – but especially the syllabic – vocabulary that would mark her improvisational style through the course of her career⁴⁰. This syllabic vocabulary was a huge part of her sense of style and rhythm, as noted in 1954 by Louis Bellson, who stated: “The greatest drum solo I ever heard was done by Ella at this time doing her scat choruses.”⁴¹

Syllabic choice was tremendously important to Ella Fitzgerald's improvisational style, and is important to the style of any scat singer. This research is an example of a kind of research lacking for all jazz vocalists and instrumentalists; that of timbre. For years, musicians have analyzed notes, but not sounds. This paper seeks to inspire others to engage in this kind of timbral research.

Methodology

³⁹ Scott Yanow, on page 78 of *The Jazz Singers* refers to much of her output on Decca as “juvenile novelties,” and Stuart Nicholson references the “critical opinion that would have us believe Ella's Decca output was an artistic no-go area” on page 131 of *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Jazz*.

⁴⁰ Geoffrey Mark Fidelman makes this argument as well, in his *First Lady of Song: Ella Fitzgerald For the Record*. On page 17, he references an early Decca recording of “(If You Can't Sing It) You'll Have to Swing It” by stating “Here, then was the first real hint of the style that was to become the backbone of the career of Ella Fitzgerald.” On pages 45-46, he discusses her recording of “It's Only a Paper Moon” with the Delta Rhythm Boys, noting “...Ella's scat singing was featured, this talent obviously having progressed.”

⁴¹ Fidelman, *First Lady of Song: Ella Fitzgerald For the Record*, 79.

In writing about Fitzgerald’s syllabic vocabulary, it is necessary to both transcribe solos and make educated judgments about how to describe the syllables she utilized. An issue involved with describing vowel behaviors and shapes is that most studies of singers’ vowel behaviors involve the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).⁴² While this is effective for analyzing more “Europeanized” vowel behaviors, as Diana Spradling writes, “Jazz artists... build their pronunciation palate from many choices that include but certainly are not limited to pure vowels.”⁴³ With that in mind, I have chosen to represent Fitzgerald’s vowel behaviors using the following labels:

- ah (as in “caught”)
- ee (as in “free)
- eoo (a diphthong⁴⁴ combining the ee and oo vowels)
- eeoh (a diphthong combining the ee and ooh vowels)
- eh (as in “bed”)
- ey (as in “gray”)
- ih (as in “hit”)
- oh (as in “boat”)
- oo (as in “boot”)
- ooe (a diphthong combining the aforementioned oo and ee vowels)
- ooh (as in “book”)
- ow (as in “shout”)

⁴² Forward, *American Diction for Singers*, 52.

⁴³ Spradling, *Jazz Singing: Developing Artistry and Authenticity*, 24.

⁴⁴ From Forward, *American Diction for Singers*, 109: “A diphthong is a single speech sound in which your articulators start in the position for one sound and immediately slide to another sound.”

- oy (a diphthong combining the aforementioned oh and ee vowels)
- uh (the unstressed, open schwa “uh”)
- A / is applied to any onset vowel accompanied by a glottal attack.⁴⁵
- All consonants are written in standard conventions of American English.
- All lyrical quotes are indicated by quotation marks.
- A mordant is indicated under the note for any sustained note with a heavy vibrato effect.

Early Fitzgerald’s Early Recorded Scat Solos

An early recorded example of Fitzgerald’s scat singing occurs on a 1944 recording of “Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall”⁴⁶ from a session featuring with the Ink Spots, an early harmony group. Immediately after singing a lyrical solo chorus, Ella provides background fills behind Hoppy Jones’ spoken-word monologue.⁴⁷ This particular example consists primarily of two-measure fills, with one four-measure phrase at the end. In analyzing Fitzgerald’s syllabic choices, it is clear that certain syllabic patterns were already beginning to emerge in her scat singing.

⁴⁵ A glottal stop is produced by obstructing airflow in the vocal tract (glottis).

⁴⁶ Source: “Ella Fitzgerald and the Ink Spots.” Recorded August 30, 1944. Master number 72370, first released on Decca 23356.

⁴⁷ This is characteristic of most recordings by the Ink Spots in the 1930s and early 1940s: lead singer Bill Kenny (1914-1978) would sing the complete melody, then bass Orville “Hoppy” Jones (1902-1944) would recite either the first half or the bridge of the song. “Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall” represents a slight departure from the template, as Kenny sings the melody, then Fitzgerald sings more stylized version of the melody, followed by the half-chorus monologue with scat fills.

“Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall” (2:08-2:36)

The musical score consists of four staves of music in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The lyrics are: doht dee duht boh duht dee bahp m deel yuh doo ee ee dl uhp ee dl uh dl uh boh doo bee doo dm buh boh bee dm boo boh bee dm dwee boo bee dm dih boo booh bih doo bih doo dm bih bih doo bih doo dm bip. Chord symbols are: BbMa, B dim7, Cmi7, F7, Cmi, BbMa, B dim7, Cmi7, F7, Eb7.

A breakdown of syllables used in these fills:

- bahp, bee (5), bih (5), bihp, boh (4), boo (3), booh, buh
- dee (2), deel, dih, dl (3), dm (6), doht, doo (7), duht (2), dwee
- non-dental onsets: ee (3), m, uh (2), uhp, yuh

In just sixteen measures, Fitzgerald’s syllabic palate revolved almost exclusively around syllables beginning with the dental consonants /b/ (21 instances) and /d/ (24 instances) with a limited mix of vowels in combination. Also interesting to note is the use of the syllables /dl/ and /dm/ as connective syllables in the middle of the lines, providing the effect of ghosted notes.

In observing the development of Fitzgerald’s vocabulary, it is valuable to look at another recording following the template “Ella sings background fills behind the melody”: a 1945

recording of “It’s Only a Paper Moon” from a 1945 session with the Delta Rhythm Boys.⁴⁸ Note the drastic change in syllabic timbre in this recording.

“It’s Only a Paper Moon” (1:16-1:38)

The musical score consists of three staves of music in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The lyrics are written below the notes, and chord symbols are placed above the staff. The lyrics are: "bah ee — buh buh boo boo", "bee NOTE: the upcoming 'tree' syllable involves a flipped r consonant tree oo tree oo tree oo dm bee", and "boh bee boh bee oo ee oo boh boo boo bee boo".

Fitzgerald’s fills take on a bit more of a humorous nature here. The nearly complete abandonment of the onset consonant /d/ is noteworthy. A breakdown of syllables used in these fills:

- dental onsets: bah, bee (4), boh (3), boo (5), buh (3), dm
- no consonant onsets: ee (2), oo (5), um
- tree (with a flipped /r/ consonant) (3)

At this point, it seems that Fitzgerald was experimenting with syllabic choices for effect, as she used the flipped /r/⁴⁹⁵⁰ for a time in the 1940s, then ceased using it entirely.

⁴⁸ Source: “Ella Fitzgerald and the Delta Rhythm Boys.” Recorded March 27, 1945. Master number 72798, first released on Decca 23425.

⁴⁹ The “flipped” or “rolled r” is a type of vocal trill in which the tip of the tongue vibrates, closing and opening the air passage.

⁵⁰ Ladefoged and Maddieson, *The Sounds of the World’s Languages*, 215-245.

Flying Home

An important session in Fitzgerald’s syllabic development is her 1945 session of “Flying Home,”⁵¹ her first purely “instrumentalized” recording.⁵² In this recording, Fitzgerald begins by singing Illinois Jacquet’s famous recorded 1942 solo⁵³ – though not note-for-note – before singing her own material.

“Flying Home” Introduction (0:02-0:11)

The musical notation shows the introduction of 'Flying Home' in 4/4 time, starting with a key signature of three flats (B-flat major). The melody is transcribed with syllables below it:

bah yah luhp bah — lah bah dah dl ah dee oo dl
 ah dee oo bee ah dee dlee doh — doo dlee doy — blee ah dn dah dn doot zoyt boh ehm

A breakdown of syllables used in the introduction:

- ah (4)
- bah (3), bee, blee, boh
- dah (2), dee (3), dl (2), dlee (2), dn (2), doh, doo, doot, doy
- ehm
- lah, luhp
- oo (2)
- yah
- zoyt

⁵¹ Source: “Ella Fitzgerald, acc. by Vic Schoen and His Orchestra.” Recorded October 4, 1945. Master number 73066, first released on Decca 23956.

⁵² Morgenstern, “The First Lady of Song”, 16. Liner notes for *Ella Fitzgerald 75th Birthday Celebration*, MCA Records & GRP Records, 1993.

⁵³ This recording, made with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, is regarded as a jazz classic, and is often considered to be one of the first rock and roll records.

⁵⁴ Rickert, “Lionel Hampton: ‘Flying Home’”, AllAboutJazz.com.

In just this eight-measure introduction, it is clear to observe the expansion of Fitzgerald's syllabic palette. The use of the /d/ consonant returns strongly, the /l/ consonant is utilized more to assist in moving through notes at bebop tempi, and the syllable "zoyt" appears for the only time I have encountered in her recorded history. A further breakdown of this introduction can analyze her solos in the following manner:

- dental consonant onsets (b and d): 21
- vocalized consonant onsets (l, y, and z): 3
- onsets with consonants behaving as vowels (y): 1
- vowel onsets: 7

A complete breakdown of these syllables throughout "Flying Home" is provided at the end of the analysis.

“Flying Home” Chorus 1 (0:29-1:04)

boy doo bee bwee — boy — doot doo boop bwee — boot

dih dee oot daht laht lah dlee oo dah — loh dn loh dey oht dey loh dl ah loh bee oh boy —

boo ee dlee doo dee boo boo bwee boo ee dlee doo dee boo boo bwee

oo dee oo boo bahp oo dee oo bahp oo dee oo beh — lah dn doh lah dn doh buh doo bee —

booe dah duh dah doh dey — dah dee oo dlee dah boo dee

— bah dl oo dl ee dee doo — dee oo dl ah voh dl ey loh dl ey loh dl

oh bee oot deet loht beep boo ihp boh — dlee oot beet lahp doop boo ihp

"Mer - ri - ly, we roll a - long, on a deep, deep, deep, blue sea." Boo -

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 1:

- ah (2)
- bah, bahp (2), bee (3), beep, beet, beh, boh, boo (9), booe, boop, boot, boy (3), buh, bwee (4)

- dah (5), daht, dee (10), deet, dey (3) dih, dl (7), dlee (5), dn (3), doh (3), doo (6), doop, doot, duh
- ee (3), ey (2)
- ihp (2)
- lah (3), lahp, laht, loh (6), loht
- oh (2), oht, oo (10), oot (3)
- voh

Immediately, it is clear to see Fitzgerald's syllabic choices narrowing into defined combinations of /b/, /d/, and /l/ attacks, with "oo" and "dl" being the most commonly utilized connective syllables. This also marks the first appearance of the diphthong "ooee". Here we can clearly see Ella identifying the syllabic patterns that would most cleanly allow her to navigate bebop solo lines.

“Flying Home” Chorus 2 (1:05-1:40)

sea." Boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee booh boo ee booh boop bwec rihp

NOTE: Upcoming grace notes indicate a flipped /r/ consonant

dih oot leet laht lee bahp rihp dih oot leet laht lee bahp

dih oot leet laht laa bahp doo-ee daht dee boop boo bihp bwec dohn doo

doot doo dl oo diht doot boo yihp boot doo dl oo diht booe boo

dee oo dl ah lah dl ah dloh dlehn bah bee oo dn liht doo dl iht doo dl ee

bop dooce boo bee oo bee yihp vaht doo dee oo dl ee blee oo boy

voy doy deeooodoo deeo dow deeo doo lee dee ah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 2:

- ah (3)
- bah, bahp (4), bee (3), bihp, blee, boo (7), booe (13), booh, boop (2), boot, boy, bwec (2)

- daht, dee (4), deeo (3), dih (3), diht (2), dl (8), dlehn, dloh, dn, dohn, doo (4), dooee (2), doo (5), doot (2), dow, doy
- ee (3)
- iht
- lah, laht (3), lee (4) leet (3), liht
- nah (13)
- oo (8), oot (3)
- rihp (with a flipped /r/) (3)
- vaht, voy
- yihp (2)

In this chorus, Fitzgerald experiments a bit more with vowel colors (note the use of both the “ooee” and “eeoo” diphthongs), but maintains the general focus on /b/, /d/, and /l/ syllabic onsets. Three unique things to note about this particular chorus: the use of the flipped /r/ consonant, the use of /v/ as a syllabic onset, and the long ascending scalar sequence on the syllable “nah” leading into the modulation at the end of the chorus.

“Flying Home” Chorus 3 and Tag Ending (1:41-2:24)

CMa7 Ami7 Dmi7 G7 CMa7 Ami7 Dmi7 G7
 neel dih gih doo duh deel yoh dm boh bey bwee oo bee oo duh dehl yoh dl oh beh
 CMa7 Ami7 Dmi7 G7 CMa G7
 bwee oo bee doo duh dehl yoh dl oh beh "Hor - ses. Hor - ses. Hor - ses." goo bee doo bee
 CMa7 Ami7 Dmi7 G7 CMa7 Ami7 Dmi7 G7
 doo dee oo dee oo duh dehl yoh dl oh beh bwee oo dee oo duh dehl yoh dl oh beh
 CMa7 Ami7 Dmi7 G7 CMa
 bwee oo dee oo duh dehl oh dl o deh boo - ee boo - ee boo - ee booe
 C7 FMa
 booe buh lee bah bob dee doo dl
 D7 G7 3 3
 ee bah boop dee oo dlee mooh mooh mooh mah mah mah mahp "Wham!" boo-
 CMa7 C/Bb Ami7 G7 CMa7 C/Bb Ami7 G7
 oot doot dee boyt loo dee boyt doo duh lee dee doo dlee oo woh
 CMa7 C/Bb Ami7 G7
 boyt doo duh lee dee doo dl oo deel boyt dee doo dl ee dee dih dl ee boy boot
 dee doo dl ee dee dih dl ee boy boot dee doo dl ee dee doo dl ee dl ih dih dl ih dih
 dl ih dih dl ih dih bah rihp

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 3 and Tag Ending:

- bah (3), bahb, bee (5), beh (5), bey, boh, boo, booe (5), boop, boot (2), boy (3), boyt (5),
buh, bwee (4)
- dee (18), deel (2), deh, dehl (5), dih (8), dl (19), dlee (2), dm, doo (13), doot, duh (8)
- ee (9)
- gih, goo
- ih (4)
- lee (3), loo
- mah (3), mooh (3)
- neel
- oh (6), oo (13), oot
- rihp
- woh
- yoh (5)

In this heavily sequence-based final chorus and coda, Fitzgerald's syllabic choices narrow strongly to focus on the onset consonant /d/, adding extra percussiveness to her lines. This chorus also features the use of /g/ as an onset consonant for the first time, as well as utilizing /m/ as a syllabic onset, rather than a standalone hum.

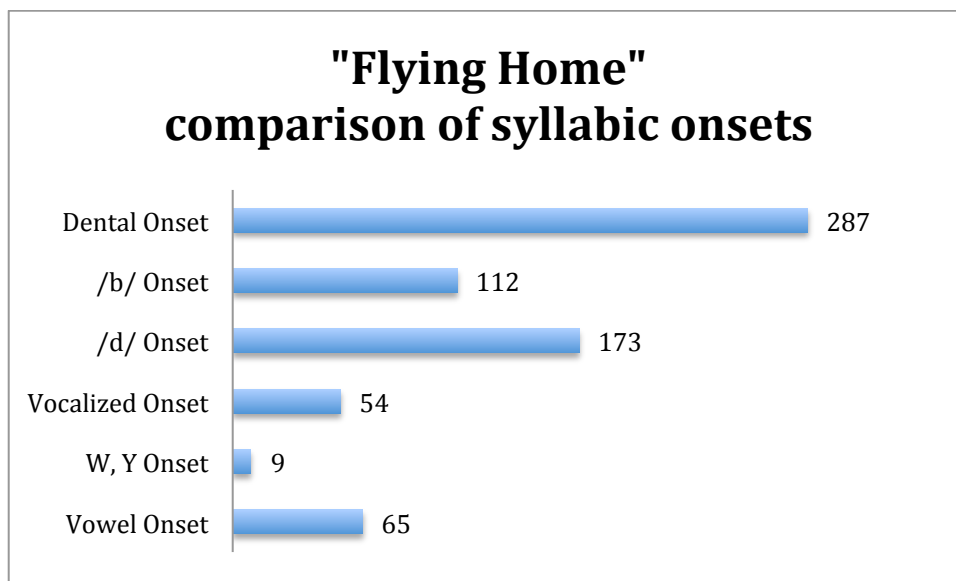
A complete analysis of Ella Fitzgerald's syllabic choices on "Flying Home" reveals heavy usage of /d/ and /b/ onset consonants (in that order), with semi-frequent usage of the onset consonant /l/ and frequent usage of the connective syllables "oo" and "ee", with other syllabic choices occurring quite infrequently in comparison to those addressed.

“Flying Home” Complete Syllabic Analysis

- ah (9)
- bah (8), bahb, bahp (6), bee (12), beep, beet, beh (6), bey, bihp, blee (2), boh (3), boo (16), booe (19), booh, boop (4), boot (4), boy (7), boyt (5), buh (2), bwee (10)
- dah (7), daht (2), dee (35), deel (2), deeo (3), deet, deh (2), dehl (5) dih (12), diht (2), dl (36), dlee (9), dlehn, dloh, dm, dn (6), doh (5), doo (25), dooe (2), doop, doot (3), dow, doy (2), duh (9)
- ee (15), ehm, ey (2)
- gih, goo
- ih (4), ihp (2), iht
- lah (5), lahp, laht (4), lee (4), leet (3), liht, loh (6), loht, loo, luhp
- mah (3), mooh (3)
- nah (13), neel
- oh, (8), oht, oo (33), oot (7)
- rihp (with a flipped /r/) (3), rihp (no flip)
- vaht, voy
- woh
- yah, yihp, yoh (6)
- zoyt

From this specific analysis, broader groups can be identified out of variants on the following syllables: “bah” (15), “bee” (14), “boo” (44), “boy” (12), “dee” (41), “dih” (14), “dl” (47), “doo” (31), “lah” (10), and “oo” (40), along with the standalone syllables “bwee” (10), “ee” (15), and “nah” (13). A comparison between Fitzgerald’s broad groups here and between

another collection is provided later. For now, it is instructive to examine Fitzgerald's syllabic choices on "Flying Home" in terms of onset choice:



At this point, it is easy to recognize a number of syllabic structures that would serve as Ella Fitzgerald's primary vocabulary through the rest of her career. However, significant changes would be coming to her improvisational approach.

Oh, Lady Be Good

Following her 1946 tour with the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra⁵⁵, Fitzgerald went into the studio to record arguably her most well-known and influential scat recording: “Oh, Lady Be Good.”⁵⁶ This recording, in many ways, represents an evolution, not only in melodic and harmonic content of her improvisational soloing, but particularly in terms of syllabic construction. As Nicholson wrote: “For Ella, whose remarkable ear intuitively reacted to the subtle chord voicings, bop represented a challenge that linked her vocal technique to her powerful, propulsive rhythmic gift.” Also: “Such a stylistic Rubicon was too wide for the swing musicians to cross; they could only look on as bebop took over... Some, like Coleman Hawkins and Don Byas, almost succeeded in adapting to bop, but only one – Ella Fitzgerald – successfully made the transition. In a music dominated by males, this was no mean achievement.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Fitzgerald: “We used to play theatres, what we used to call ‘around the world. When the band would go out to jam, I liked to go out with Dizzy because I used to get thrilled listening to them when he did his bebop. That’s actually the way I feel I learned what you call bop. It was quite an experience, and he used to always tell me, ‘Come on up and do it with the fellas.’ That was my education in learning how to really bop. We used to do Oo-Bop-Sh’Bam-a-Klook-a-Mop.’ That’s one of the first things I remember he used to do... and that fascinated me. When I felt like I could sing that, then I felt like I was in.” Source: Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Song*, 96.

⁵⁶ Source: “Ella Fitzgerald, acc. by Bob Haggart and His Orchestra.” Recorded March 18, 1947. Master number 73820, first released on Decca 23956.

⁵⁷ Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Song*, 97.

“Oh, Lady Be Good” Chorus 1 (0:35-1:05)

dih dl eh dee oo dee oo dee doo dl oht doh dl eh dley oh dloo leht doh dl eh dley oh dl

ih dee bah dah dee ah dah yoh leh yah doh ah eh ah doh leh eh ah doh ley ah dl oh ley ah dl oh ley ehn bihp blee

bihp hiht dee doo dn ah dm bah bee ih bihp liht dee doo dn lah dl ah dee

ih dee oo dee dihp doo dee dih dee loh dl ey oo loh dl ah dl ah dl oo dooh doo dl ee boy

bee ih dih dih dl oo dee oo dl oo bee oo bihp bee ih dih doo dl oo dee oo dl oo bee oo bihp boy

— doo dl ee lah dl ah loh dley(uh) bah bee oo dn lah dee oo duh leh doh duh dey duh duh duh

rihp ah oon doht leyt doh dey doh deh duh doo dee lih dee doo dn lah dey lah dl ah dl

oh dee dee dl ah dl oh beyl yihp bah boh beh doom boh behm

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 1:

- ah (14)
- bah (4), bee (8), beh, behm, beyl, bihp (6), biht, blee, boh, bohph, boy(2)

- dah (2), dee (20), deh, dey (4), dih (6), dihp, dl (24), dley (2, one with a shadow vowel “uh” attached), dloo, dm, dn (5), doh (8), doht, doo (9), dooh, doom, duh (7)
- ee (2), eh (5), ehn, ey
- ih (6)
- lah (5), leh (3), leht, ley (3), leyt, lih, liht, loh (3)
- rihp
- oh (6), oht, oo (21), oon
- yah, yihp, yoh

In the first chorus of “Oh, Lady Be Good,” Fitzgerald begins establishing a new (for her) bebop-influenced vocabulary, driven largely by syllabic combinations using the syllable /dl/ as a connective line. Also of note here are the volume of syllables beginning with the vocalized consonant /l/, a timbral characteristic more often associated with Sarah Vaughan. The various syllables beginning with /y/ are also more commonly associated with Vaughan⁵⁸, which hints at Fitzgerald possibly having a greater influence on Vaughan than is often posited. The more overt use of the onset consonant /d/ is a phonemic choice that Mel Tormé would admittedly borrow from Fitzgerald in his own improvisational style.⁵⁹ Harmonically (but also connected with her syllabic vocabulary), this chorus also contains early instances of Fitzgerald utilizing “ghost notes” – pitches that are more inferred than they are tonal. This is a common instrumental practice, so it is instructive to see Fitzgerald incorporating this technique after her time touring

⁵⁸ Examples of Vaughan’s fluid style of scat improvisation on both “Shulie A Bop” and “All of Me” from her 1954 10-inch LP *Sarah Vaughan* and her 1957 studio album *Swingin’ Easy* (EmArcy 36109).

⁵⁹ A clear example of this is Tormé’s recording of “Route 66” from *Live at the Maisonette* (Atlantic), in which Tormé sings two scat choruses demonstrating to the audience how Ella would sing the song if she were there.

with Gillespie. At the end of this chorus, Ella also includes a musical quote from Percy Grainger's "Country Gardens."

"Oh, Lady Be Good" Chorus 2 (1:05-1:34)

The musical score is written in B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. It consists of eight staves of music. The first staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "boo dih loo dooh oo bee ooh booh eh eeoh buh dih loo dl doo bih doo dih beeooh bihp bih dl". The second staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "ih dl ih dl ee dl ah dl ah dl ee dl ee dee dl ah dl ah dl oyl yah dee dl ah dl ah dl oh dehn dey". The third staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "oh doh ley dn dey lah dl ey doh dl ey doh dl ey bahp bey bey oh beyb". The fourth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "bey deh lee dooh dee dl ah dl ah deh dl ee doo dl ah lah dl ah doh bl eh bah loh beym". The fifth staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "'Tis - ket, a - tas - ket, I lost my yel - low bas - ket!". The sixth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "bah dih doo breh bah bree boym boo dooh dee bih boo bree oy booh". The seventh staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "oo - ee _____ dih ee dl ah dl ah duhp bweem duh dee dl ah dl ah dl". The eighth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "ee _____ dooh dee dn ah bl oh buh bee uh boym _____ boo".

Chord markings above the staves include: B^bMa7, Cmi7, F7, B^bMa7, EbMa7, C7, F7, B^bMa7, Dmi7, G7, Cmi7, F7, B^bMa7, F7, B^bMa7, F7.

Lyrics for the first staff: boo dih loo dooh oo bee ooh booh eh eeoh buh dih loo dl doo bih doo dih beeooh bihp bih dl

Lyrics for the second staff: ih dl ih dl ee dl ah dl ah dl ee dl ee dee dl ah dl ah dl oyl yah dee dl ah dl ah dl oh dehn dey

Lyrics for the third staff: oh doh ley dn dey lah dl ey doh dl ey doh dl ey bahp bey bey oh beyb

Lyrics for the fourth staff: bey deh lee dooh dee dl ah dl ah deh dl ee doo dl ah lah dl ah doh bl eh bah loh beym

Lyrics for the fifth staff: "Tis - ket, a - tas - ket, I lost my yel - low bas - ket!"

Lyrics for the sixth staff: bah dih doo breh bah bree boym boo dooh dee bih boo bree oy booh

Lyrics for the seventh staff: oo - ee _____ dih ee dl ah dl ah duhp bweem duh dee dl ah dl ah dl

Lyrics for the eighth staff: ee _____ dooh dee dn ah bl oh buh bee uh boym _____ boo

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 2:

- ah (15)
- bah (3), bahp, bee (2), becooh, bey (3), beyb, beym, bih (3), bihp, bl (2), boo (3), booh, boym (2), bree (2, with a flipped /r/), breh (with a flipped /r/), bweem, buh (2)
- dee (6), deh (2), dehn, dey (2), dih (5), dl (27), dn (2), doh (4), doo (4), dooh (4), duh, duhp
- ee (6), eeooh, eh (2), ey (3)
- ih (2)
- lah (2), lee, ley, loh, loo (2)
- oh (4), oo, oooo, ooh, oy, oyl
- uh
- yah
- Quote: “Tisket, a-tasket, I lost my yellow basket!”

Though quoting “Tisket A-Tasket” would become a staple of Ella Fitzgerald scat solos, this represents one of the first recorded instances. In this chorus, Fitzgerald also makes use of the rhotic (“flipped”) /r/ and strikes more of a balance between /b/ and /d/ onsets. The humorous nature of the syllabic choices in the quarter-note triplets and the scalar lines that follow might also be regarded as deriving strong influence from Gillespie’s vocals, described by Robert G. O’Meally as a “...combination of good-time show-biz goofing and the serious fun of improvising jazz”⁶⁰. Several of the syllabic ideas presented here by Fitzgerald can be found on Gillespie tracks like “Ool Ya Koo.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ O’Meally. *The Jazz Singers*, 102.

⁶¹ Source: *Gene Norman Presents EP3*, recorded July 19, 1948.

“Oh, Lady Be Good” Chorus 3 (1:35-2:04)

B♭Ma7 F7 B♭Ma7 E♭Ma7 Dmi7 G7
 boo bih ohn luh dih boo bih ohn luh dih boo bih ohn luh dee dlee oo dl ah dih dl ey doo dl
 Cmi7 F7 B♭Ma7 F7
 ah dih dl ey doo dl ah lahd lehn bah bee oo dlee leh leh loh leh leh leh noh neh leh
 B♭Ma7 E♭Ma7 Dmi7 G7
 *een *dee *ce _____ *nee _____
 Cmi7 F7 B♭Ma7 B♭7
 *ee *nee *nee *nee *nee *nee *nee *nee *nee *nee nuh yee yuh yih yihn _____
 E♭Ma7 B♭Ma7
 *ce _____
 C7 F7
 bee lih duh dee dih duh dee lih duh dee dih duh dee lee doo dl ee dih duh dee dooh dooh dee dih duh dee doo dl dee dl uh *ee
 B♭Ma7 E♭Ma7 Dmi7 G7
 *buh *uh *ee _____ *buh *uh *ee _____
 Cmi7 F7 B♭Ma7 F7 B♭Ma7 F7
 _____ *nee _____ *nee _____ *nee *ih *nih _____ nih _____ dee uh

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 3:

- ah (3)
- bah, bee(2), bih (3), boo (3)
- dee (10), dih (8), dl (8) dlee (2), doo (4), dooh (2), duh (6)

- ee, ey (2)
- lahd, lee, leh (6), lehn, lih (2), loh, luh (3)
- neh, nih, noh, nuh
- ohn (3), oo (2)
- uh (2)
- yee, yih, yihn, yuh
- Raspy Arco-Bass Syllables: buh (2), dee, ee (5), een, ih, nee (13), nih, uh (2)

This solo also marks an early appearance of one of Fitzgerald's improvisational trademarks: a low, raspy, sustained tone on an "ee" vowel, designed to be reminiscent of the bowed- (arco) bass playing and vocalizing of Slam Stewart.⁶² This chorus also features broader usage of /l/ and /y/ onsets. The chromatic hemiola passage in the bridge of the chorus is reminiscent of Anita O'Day, and illustrates Fitzgerald's possible influence on O'Day's approach.⁶³ It is also worth noting the (likely) Lester Young-inspired secondary repetitive rhythm in the bridge.

⁶² Stewart was known for singing along in octaves with his bowed-bass improvisational solos, though "vocalizing" is a more accurate term, as Stewart half-sung-half-mumbled in a raspy voice, which, again, Fitzgerald paid homage to in her solo approach. A fine example of both Stewart and Major Holley employing this solo approach can be found on their 1981 duo recording of "Close Your Eyes (Shut Yo' Mouth)" from *Shut Yo' Mouth* (Delos DE1024).

⁶³ Consider O'Day's recording of "The Way You Look Tonight" from the 1959 album *Cool Heat: Anita O'Day Sings Jimmy Giuffre Arrangements* (Verve MGV (S6) 8312).

“Oh, Lady Be Good” Chorus 4 (2:04-2:34)

eet dih dee laht dah ee uh boo bee uh boo bee uh boo bee
 ih— bih dooh yooh dooh dooh doo dey oo dah doo dey doy ah doo dah dm dey ohb dey oh dluh
 oh boÿ bah buh doh dleh ley ley— boy boÿ bih dl ey dih dih dl
 ah dl dih bee oo dee oo dl ah dl ah dl doo dee oo doh oy dee doo dl uh bee doo deh doo dl oh /ehm
 boh dl oh dl oh dl ah boh ehr— boh dl oh dl oo dl iht doo ehr—
 boh dee dn lih dee dn dah dah dn lih dee ah lee ah ah (OO DOO BOW—BAH OO DN BEE DLEE AH)
 oh dee dee dlee oo dn dee bah oo— dee oo dee oo dee oo dee oo dee oo dee oo dee oo bee
 — uh loot deel ooh— bee oot bih oo— bee oot dee ih— dee oo dlee doh dl oht

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 4:

- ah (8)
- bah (2), bee (8), bih (3), boh (4), boo (3), boy (3), buh

- dah (5), dee (19), deel, deh, dey (5), dih (4), dl (15), dlee (2), dleh, dluh, dm, dn (4), doh (3), doo (8), dooh (3),
- eet, /ehm, ehr (2), ey
- ih (2), iht
- laht, lee, ley (2), lih (2), loot
- oh (8), ohb, oht, oo (16), oot (2), oy
- uh (5)
- yooh
- Variable-Pitch Percussives: AH, BAH, BEE, BOW, DLEE, DN, DOO, OO (3)

Once again, Fitzgerald makes use of ghost notes in this chorus, but there are new things to note here. First, Fitzgerald uses a strong glottal attack on an “ehm” syllable, and she will do this even more in the following chorus. Second, the end of the bridge features a series of variable-pitch percussive tones that are meant to be more reminiscent of a drum set than any specific melodic or harmonic idea. The reliance on the “ee” vowel in this chorus also hints at Fitzgerald being more of an influence on Betty Carter than she is sometimes credited.⁶⁴ Finally, Fitzgerald continues the use of musical quotes by briefly referencing the melody of the jazz standard “Star Eyes” in the ninth measure of this chorus.

⁶⁴ For instance, examine the young Carter’s 1956 recording of “Frenesi” from *Meet Betty Carter and Ray Bryant* (Columbia JC 36425; CO55873). A number of Carter’s linear and syllabic ideas have parallels with concepts Fitzgerald used in this solo.

“Oh, Lady Be Good” Chorus 5 (2:34-3:05)

doh dley dey ey ey /ah /ah___ buh dee doh dley dey ey ey /oy___ /ooh

___ dn dee /ooh dn dee /ooh___ dee dn rih bih blee oo boo boym___ "Oop

bop sh' bam a klook a mop!" dee dih lih dl dih dee lih dl uh ooh - ee ee

ih dih dn dih dlee ah___ bih doo dih dee ah___ bahp blee ah dl ah doh loh dl oh deyl___

bah blee oh doo lah dee doh lah dee oo dee oo doo loh dl oy uh oym___ beh

oh dl deh dih deh dih dee dah doo deh doot dee oo bahp beh oo daht bee oo bahp bee ooh behm

"I'm just a lone - some babe in the woods. ___ Oh, la - dy, ___ oh,

la - dy, la - dy won't you be so good to me?" bah___ bee doo dlee dah bee doo dn doo boy

A breakdown of syllables used in Chorus 5:

- ah (3), /ah (3)
- bah (2), bahp (3), bee (4), beh (2), behm, bih (2), blee (2), boo, boy, boym, buh

- dah (2), daht, dee (11), deh (3), dey (2), deyl, dih (7), dl (5), dlee (2), dley (2), dn (5), doh (2), doo (7), doot
- ee, ey (4)
- ih
- lah, lih (2), loh (2)
- oh (3), oo (7), ooe, /ooh (3), oy, /oy, oym
- rih
- uh (2)
- Lyric: “I’m just a lonesome babe in the woods. Oh, lady, oh, lady, lady won’t you be so good to me?”
- Quote: “Oop bop sh’bam a klook a mop!”

Again, Fitzgerald uses a strong glottal attack on a number of syllables. Additionally, Fitzgerald quotes the Dizzy Gillespie song title “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”⁶⁵⁶⁶ – yet another indication of just how much of an influence that particular tour was on Fitzgerald’s development as a bebop improviser.

A complete analysis of Ella Fitzgerald’s syllabic choices on “Oh, Lady Be Good” reveals a broadening syllabic palette featuring a primary emphasis on /d/ onset consonants, the constant usage of the connective syllable /dl/ to facilitate lines at bebop tempos, and a broadened use of quotes, un-pitched syllables, and the raspy bowed-bass mimicry that would become one of her improvisational staples.

⁶⁵ Kenny Clarke, the drummer in the Gillespie band, was known for a combination of a snare drum rim shot followed directly by a kick drum accent. This earned Clarke the nickname “Klook,” short for “Klook-mop” – an imitation of the sound produced by those accents. The name was then immortalized in the lyrics of “Oop Bop Sh’Bam.”

⁶⁶ Gitler, *Jazz Masters of the Forties*, 290.

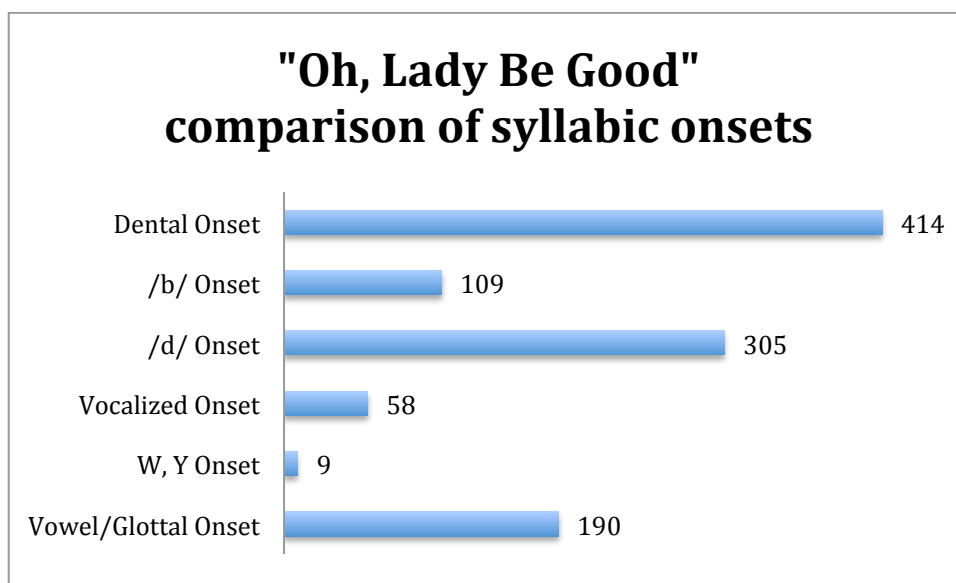
- ah (43), /ah (3)
- bah (12), bahp (4), bee (24), beeooh, beh (2), behm (2), bey (3), beyb, beyl, beym, bih (11), bihp (7), biht, bl (2), blee (3), boh (5), boh p, boo (10), booh, boy (6), boym (3), bree (2, with a flipped /r/), breh (with a flipped /r/), buh (4), bweem
- dah (9), daht, dee (66), deel, deh (7), dehn, dey (13), deyl, dih (30), dihp, dl (79), dlee (6), dleh, dley (4, one with a shadow vowel “uh” attached), dloo, dluh, dm (2), dn (16), doh (9), doht, doo (36), dooh (7), doom, doot, duh (9), duhp
- ee (10), eeooh, eet, eh (7), /ehm,, ehn, ehr (2), ey (10)
- ih (11), iht
- lah (8), lahd, laht, lee (3), leh (9), lehn, leht, ley (6), leyt, lih (7), liht, loh (7), loo (2), loot, luh (3)
- neh, nih, noh, nuh
- oh (21), ohb, ohn (3) oht (2), oo (47), ooee (2), ooh, /ooh (3), oon, oot (2), oy (3), /oy, oyl, oym
- rih. rihp
- uh (10)
- yah (2), yee, yih, yihn, yihp, yoh, yooh, yuh
- Lyrics: “I’m just a lonesome babe in the woods. Oh, lady, oh, lady, lady won’t you be so good to me?”
- Quotes: “Tisket, a-tasket, I lost my yellow basket!” “Oop bop sh’bam a klook a mop!”
- Raspy Arco-Bass Syllables: buh (2), dee, ee (5), een, ih, nee (13), nih, uh (2)
- Variable-Pitch Percussives: AH, BAH, BEE, BOW, DLEE, DN, DOO, OO (3)

From this specific analysis, broader groups can be identified out of variants on the following syllables:

- “ah” and variants (46)
- “bah” and variants (16)
- “bee” and variants (25)
- “beh,” “bey,” and variants (10)
- “bih” and variants (19)
- “boo” and variants (10)
- “dah” and variants (10)
- “dee” and variants (67)
- “deh,” “dey,” and variants (22)
- “dih” and variants (31)
- “dl” and variants (92)
- “dn” (16)
- “doh” and variants (10)
- “doo” and variants (45)
- “duh” and variants (10)
- “ee” and variants (10)
- “eh,” “ey,” and variants (21)
- “ih” and variants (12)
- “lah” and variants (10)
- “leh,” “ley,” and variants (18)
- “oh” and variants (27)

- “oo” and variants (56)
- “uh” (10)
- Raspy arco-bass “nee” and variants (20)

And it is also easy to see a shift in syllabic onsets as well:

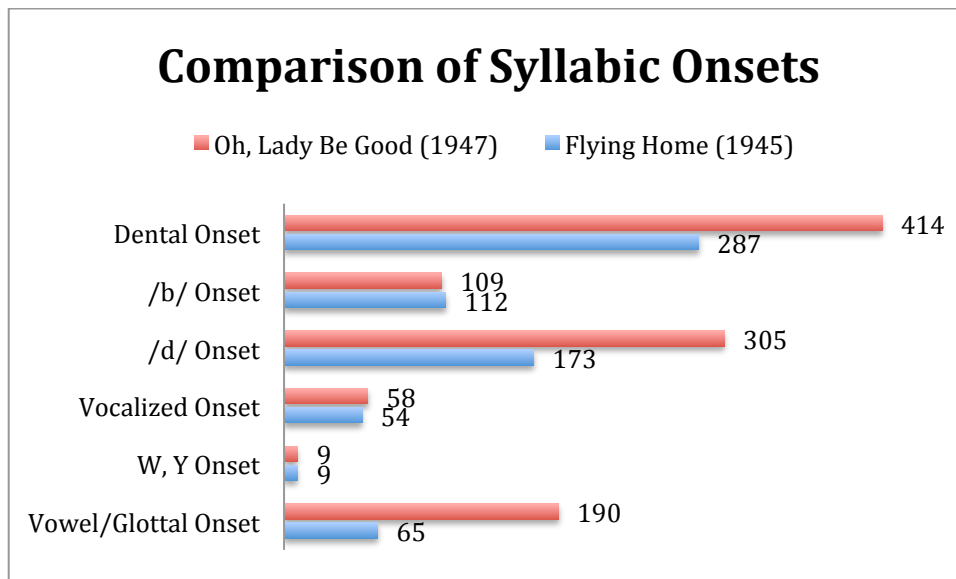


Observing Ella Fitzgerald’s timbral and phonemic development:

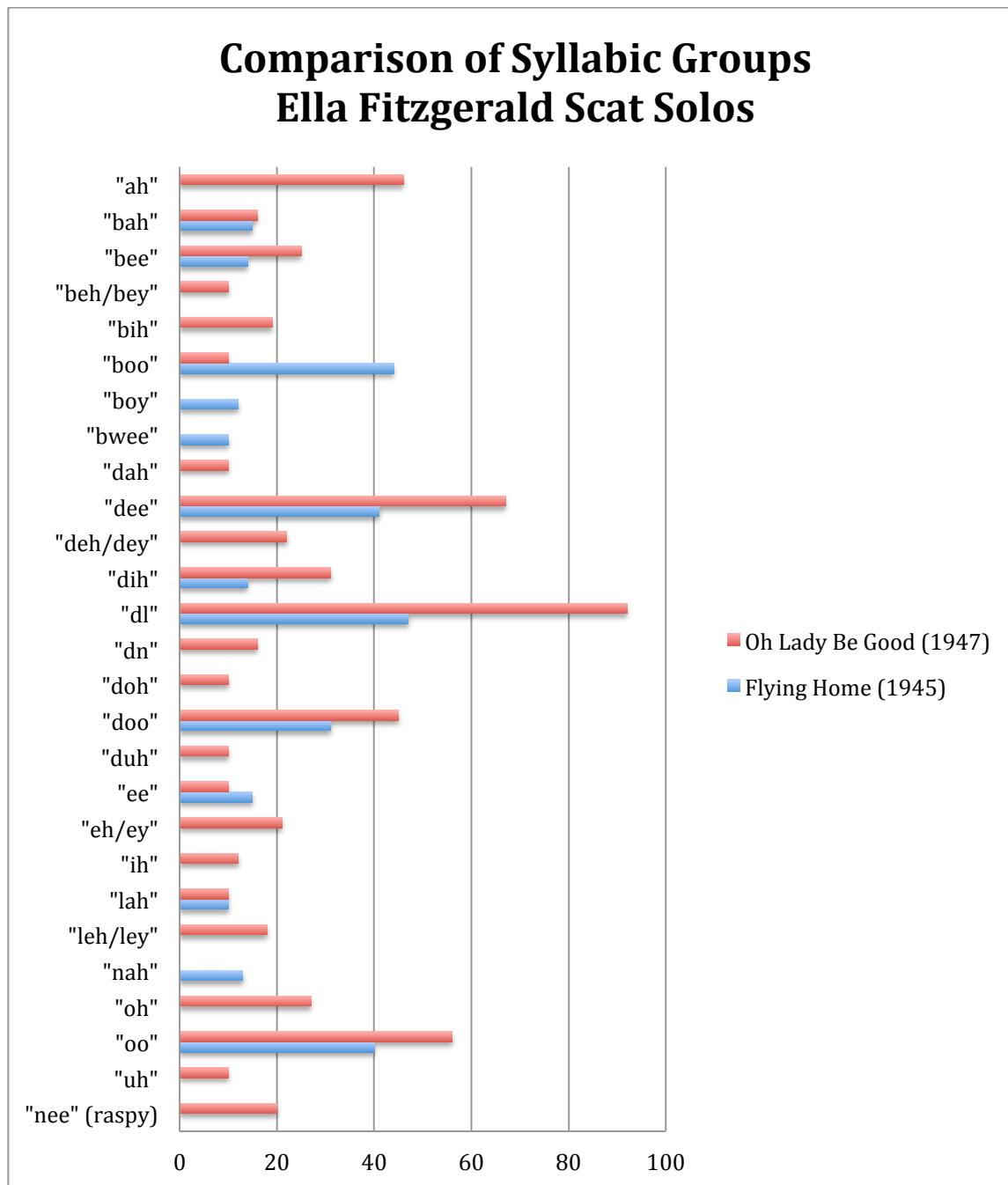
“Flying Home” vs. “Oh, Lady Be Good”

In comparing these two seminal Ella Fitzgerald solos, it becomes clear to see how her syllabic improvisational style changed following her time with the Dizzy Gillespie big band.

Note the two most significant changes:



As Fitzgerald became more and more immersed in bebop style, she found it necessary to revise the way in which she articulated the attack points of notes. Fitzgerald found it more useful in the bebop idiom to articulate with /d/ and vowel onsets, creating more of an imbalance in her syllabic vocabulary. This difference becomes even more apparent in looking at what I will call “Syllabic Groupings.” For purposes of this essay, a “Syllabic Group” is a collection of syllables that 1) share a “syllabic root” (for instance, “dee,” “deel,” and “deet” are all members of the “dee” Syllabic Group”) and 2) appear ten or more times in a given recording.



Notice how the most common Syllabic Groups in “Flying Home” (“boo,” “dee,” “dl,” “doo,” and “oo”) make a subtle but important shift in “Oh, Lady Be Good” (“ah,” “bee,” “dee,” “deh/dey,” “dih,” “dl,” “doo,” “ee,” “oh,” “oo,” and the raspy-arco “nee”). Generally speaking, Fitzgerald used a brighter, more forward vowel shape articulated with an onset /d/.

Opportunities for Further Research

Between 1944 and 1947, Ella Fitzgerald's improvisational approach changed drastically, largely through syllabic changes driven by the new bebop jazz style. It can be posited that Fitzgerald's tours with the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra played a key role in this improvisational development. Fitzgerald's syllabic evolution continued throughout the period she recorded for Decca Records (1939-1955), and further analysis of recordings like "How High the Moon,"⁶⁷ "Airmail Special,"⁶⁸ and "Preview"⁶⁹ will only serve to add to knowledge of this important transitional stage of Fitzgerald's career.

In this analysis, I have pointed out moments in which Ella's improvisational ideas – melodic, harmonic, and especially syllabic – seem to foreshadow the improvisational styles of younger scat singers who immediately followed Fitzgerald, including Anita O'Day, Carmen McRae, Jon Hendricks, Sarah Vaughan, Mel Tormé, and Betty Carter.⁷⁰ I feel that further research, including transcription and analysis, will show that all of the aforementioned singers incorporated significant amounts of syllabic material that can be shown to have its roots in Fitzgerald's development as a scat singer during the formative stages of her career.

It will also be important to explore the influence of Louis Armstrong and Leo Watson on Ella's improvisational approach. Armstrong is widely regarded as the father of modern scat singing.⁷¹ Watson's influence on Fitzgerald's style has been documented in several sources.⁷²

⁶⁷ Master number 74324, Decca 24387.

⁶⁸ Master number 82075, Decca 28126.

⁶⁹ Master number 83014, Decca 28321.

⁷⁰ Consider the quote from Bauer's "Scat Singing: A Timbral and Phonemic Analysis" that references Carter's early solos being "peppered with... vocal licks out of Fitzgerald's vocabulary such as the rapid alteration of syllables that start with /n/ and /d/."

⁷¹ There are too many sources to mention here, but most standard accounts of both general music history and jazz history cite Armstrong's 1926 recording of "Heebie Jeebies" as the advent of modern scat singing.

As I wrote earlier, syllabic choice is vitally important to the style of any scat singer. This paper seeks to inspire others to engage in this kind of research dedicated to timbral and phonemic choices in scat singing, and to build upon the ideas and concepts I have presented here.

⁷² Notably in Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Jazz*, 89-92.

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