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## The Frank Sinatra Show with Ella Fitzgerald

[Music Video Distributors](#) // Unrated // \$14.95 // November 16, 2004

 Review by [DVD Savant](#) | posted December 6, 2004 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

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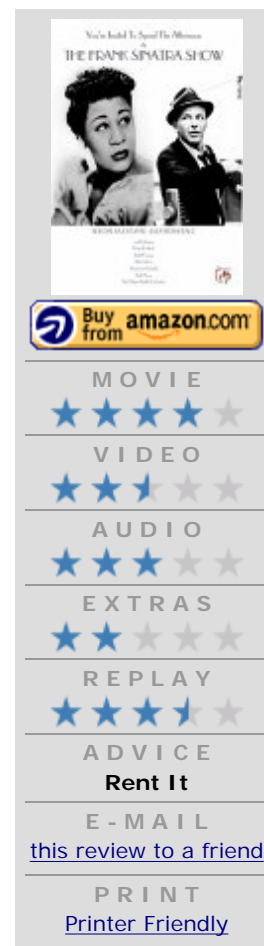
Reviewed by Glenn Erickson

In the late 1950s prime time network television seemed to be divided between Westerns and variety shows. I can strong personal memories of Dinah Shore in big poofy skirts singing *See the USA in Your Chevrolet* and being bored out of my skull when my Uncle came over and everyone had to watch Lawrence Welk. Frank Sinatra aired a number of classy specials, almost none of which can be seen today, except perhaps in television museums. This disc from Quantum Leap and Music Video Distributors presents a special show from 1959, with the unbeatable Ella Fitzgerald on board.

Part of the novelty of the show comes from the weather. The entire program was planned to be taped out of doors in Palm Springs, a Concert in the Desert, so to speak. The shooting day was rained out, a rare occasion for that part of California, and the entire show hastily rewritten for an indoor set with minimal props - mainly bar chairs and umbrellas. Frankie apparently stayed home but dispatched Peter Lawford to shoot an introduction in a cloudburst, with writers hastily cooking up a script to make fun of the company's bad luck. The only part of the show taped in the desert is a dance sequence with Juliet Prowse, which comes off rather well. What they don't explain is how the technicians were going to record live audio out there. Surely Nelson Riddle's orchestra wasn't going to set up on the sand dunes, and if they were, what would it sound like?

So they retreated to a blank sound stage, where the acoustics are just like any other Hollywood variety show of the time - excellent. Due to the ravages of time, the audio part of the program is hissy but intact - but the video on this disc is a kinescope of a 2" videotape, or a videotape of a kinescope. Either way it doesn't look very good. It's a shame these great talents didn't have the foresight shown by Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz to use film; if that were so they'd be re-running these vintage variety shows even now. Here's the lineup of

Songs:

Sinatra: *I've Got the World on a String, You're Invited to Spend the Afternoon, Too Marvelous for Words, Love is Here to Stay, Here's that Rainy*

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Day; The Hi-Los: *Lazy Afternoon, Love Walked Right In*; Fitzgerald: *There's a Lull in My Life, Just You Just Me, He Loves, She Loves, They Love and I Love You*.

Gingold and Lawford: *Comes to Love, Nothing Can be Done*; Sinatra and Prowse: *It's Alright with Me*; Prowse: *Too Darn Hot* (dance); Sinatra and the Hi-Los: *I'll Never Smile Again*; Sinatra and Fitzgerald: *Can't We Be Friends*; Lawford, Gingold & Prowse: *Puttin' on the Ritz*; All: *Love is Sweeping the Country*.

Frank is his Ring-A-Ding 1950s self, cool and collected and acting like God's gift to his guest Juliet Prowse (co-star in his then-new picture, **Can-Can**). They have one number where he sings to her and the camera doesn't pull away fast enough before their mock kiss, so we see their faces hovering side by side, as if repelled by static electricity. Lawford is his bland self and Gingold cute enough, but both struggle in the variety format that leaves little room for spontaneity. The great diva Fitzgerald either sits or stands but never moves, yet her voice is still the center of the show. You can tell she's a legend by how much Sinatra worships her.

Nelson Riddle is also treated like quality goods, and Sinatra addresses a personal get-well greeting to Cole Porter, who I believe at this time was on his deathbed. Perhaps because it's his own show, Sinatra is especially polite to his guest performers - no late-career sarcasm here. An unexpected highlight comes when he sings in harmony with the Hi-Los, just as he used to do as a young performer.

The show comes intact with all of its cornball Timex ads. John Cameron Swayze officiates as a Timex is shot through a plate glass window on the nose of an arrow. With their poor-quality supered titles, the ads really are a time capsule. Swayze talks to one of Santa's tiny elves matted like an ornament into a yule tree, reminding us that this was a Christmas show that aired on December 10, 1959.

Quantum Leap's liner notes say that "While the quality of reproduction may not meet modern technological standards, (the show) is a rare record of two of the most popular performers of the twentieth century performing together.." The rarity part is true, but the quality of the disc isn't up to minimum 1959 standards, either. The picture has videotape wrinkles, film scratches & dirt, and some very badly blooming video. When Juliet Prowse dances in the desert, she's surrounded by a black aura of video burnout. In other words, I'd place the quality of the show as the same as a graymarket videotape, with a more stable picture. This disc is clearly for Sinatra and Fitzgerald's key fans of the kind who will be pleased to have it in any form.

The star photos on the attractive cover are unrelated to the show.

On a scale of Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor, *The Frank Sinatra Show with Ella Fitzgerald* rates:

TV Show: Very Good

Video: Fair or slightly worse

Sound: Good -

Supplements: partial star bios and discographies

Packaging: Keep case

Reviewed: December 5, 2004

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