

Ella Grace is an award-winning performer, composer, and educator based in Chicago. Born in Georgia and raised in Minnesota, Ella has been heralded as “ultra-talented” by the Twin Cities Jazz Festival and labeled a “rising star” in the Twin Cities jazz scene. Ella moved to Chicago in 2021, where she earned a Bachelor of Music degree in Jazz Studies summa cum laude from DePaul University in 2025. In 2024, Ella won the Chicago Music Scene Fellowship, which funded her debut album as a leader, releasing March 2026 on Shifting Paradigm Records.

Ella performs frequently in the Chicago area, Midwest, and beyond both as a side-woman and bandleader with her original compositions a variety of jazz and jazz-adjacent styles. Ella has performed with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and toured internationally with the Glenn Miller Orchestra. Ella is also a passionate jazz educator and won the 2024 Jazz Education Network Jamey Aebersold Endowed Scholarship, a special distinction for young educators. Ella has a robust private studio and teaches masterclasses and summer camps across the country to help foster the next generation of jazz musicians. Most recently, Ella taught at the University of North Texas Summer Jazz Workshop.

Ella’s musical upbringing began in Minnesota. There she studied with Steve Strand, Prince’s longtime lead trumpeter, and played in the state’s top honors youth jazz ensembles including Minnesota Youth Jazz Bands, Minnesota All-State Jazz Band under the direction of Patty Darling, and the Dakota Combo under the direction of Michael Cain. In high school, Ella began leading a combo and performing professionally around the Twin Cities after placing second for top-division combos at the Eau Claire Jazz Festival. During her senior year of high school, Ella studied music full-time at the University of Minnesota with Marissa Benedict, Dean Sorenson, and Phil Hey, performing in the university’s top jazz combo and big band as well as in classical ensembles.

Aside from performing and composing, Ella is deeply passionate about furthering gender equity in jazz and recently completed a thesis project on the subject, which won the first place Sloane Prize in Undergraduate Research at the 2024 National Collegiate Honors Conference. She has presented her research on gender equity in jazz at the Chicago Women’s History Conference, Chicago Undergraduate Research Symposium, and DePaul Honors Research Conference, and will be presenting her work at the 2026 Jazz Education Network Conference. She also enjoys contributing to music journalism, and you can find some of her writing on [Substack](#). To learn more about what Ella is up to, sign up for her weekly newsletter [here](#)!