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*Judy Whitmore is a Jazz lover's dream. She has the talent and she has the presence that make for a wonderful Jazz vocalist. In her third and latest release, *Isn't It Romantic*, Judy has called on some of LA's top tier artists to join in her musical vision. And they deliver.*

*With Judy on vocals are Tamir Hendelman on piano, Lori Bell on flute, Ricky Woodard on alto and tenor saxophones, and Mike Rocha on trumpet. Mitchel Long is on acoustic guitar, the inimitable Larry Koonse on electric guitar, Alex Frank on bass, Dean Koba on drums, and Brian Kilgore on percussion. What a hot band. Tamir Hendelman, Nick Petrillo, and John Sawoski combine for the arranging.*

*Whitmore says, "The music of the Great American Songbook is a joy to sing. The melodies are gorgeous, and the lyrics are deeply expressive. The quality of these standards has stood the test of time. It's a shame that so many young people don't know these songs. I consider it my mission to help keep this music alive and vibrant." And she fulfils that mission splendidly.*

*She moves from swing to ballads and she owns them all marvelously. As a Jazz journalist and historian, I have heard these songs over and over and, while I never tire of them, there comes along an artist now and then who absolutely warms your heart. Such an artist is Judy Whitmore. I'm not overstating when I say that she actually moved me to tears once or twice. Yes, I said it.*

*From the first lines of the opening song, *It Could Happen to You*, Judy's vocal delivery is splendid and Hendelman's piano is straight-up and oh-so-fine. The Jimmy Van Heusen/Johnny Burke standard was first recorded by Dorothy Lamour in 1943 and has been recorded dozens of times by everyone from Julie London to Tony Bennett to Susanna McCorkle and Nat King Cole. Judy's version belongs in the top of anyone's list of great recordings of this song. It is a great preparation for all that follows.*



Van Heusen and Burke will get a second representation with *But Beautiful* from 1947. Hendelman's piano is again featured and Ricky Woodard's alto saxophone get to trade off before Judy takes it all back. So extraordinary.

The second track is Victor Schertzinger and Johnny Mercer's 1941 tune *I Remember You*. The beautiful ballad is treated respectfully by Judy but in a way that is truly her own. I like the way she enunciates certain consonantal blends, creating a marvelous swaying intonation of the lyrics. The Lori Bell flute is sweet and a bit melancholy. *Sunday in New York* (Peter Nero/Carroll Coates) gets excellent solos from piano, trumpet and saxophone.

*You Go to My Head* is such an extraordinary song by J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie, written in 1938. Who can forget the Judy Garland version of 1961 or Bob Dylan's cover? The languid tenor saxophone with the excellent piano is gorgeous and is a perfect setting for Judy's wonderful treatment. Oh, how she knows how to deliver.

And then comes Hoagy Carmichael's *The Nearness of You* with lyrics by Ned Washington from 1938. So help me, I can't get enough of this track. As much as I love the Ella Fitzgerald version or the Johnny Hartman or Al Jarreau versions, Judy's version of this great standard is so touching. Add the cool acoustic guitar with the flute, it carries almost an ache with it that is irresistible. I replayed this one over and over.

*The Birth of the Blues* is a 1928 Ray Henderson song that sees Judy joined by featured artist Peisha McPhee, a perfect pairing of like voices and stylings. The blistering trumpet and rollicking piano is so fine but Judy and Peisha steal the show. This gets followed by 1943's *Speak Low* by Kurt Weill and Ogden Nash. It was recorded by marvelous instrumentalists like Chet Baker, Bill Evans, and John Coltrane but the Nash lyrics add another dimension to the terrific music. And Judy just takes complete possession of it.

Alec Wilder called *Isn't It Romantic* the perfect song. Even Coach singing it off-key in *Cheers* couldn't wreck it. Written by Rodgers and Hart and introduced in 1932, Judy takes this "perfect song" and somehow makes it even better. Listen for the brilliant tenor saxophone and the brief bass lead.

*In the Wee Small Hours of Morning* (1955 by David Mann and Bob Hilliard) is a gorgeous and melancholy Jazz nocturne. The emotion and soulful longing of Judy's rendition is beyond compare. Then it all wrapped up with *Hallelujah I Love Him So* by Ray Charles from 1956. The Beatles used to sing it regularly in their Star Club residency from 1960 to 1962. Judy takes a good Gospel swing at the song and she makes it work for her.

Judy Whitmore's *Isn't It Romantic* is a jewel, as is she. The album and the singer deserve wide-spread attention and admiration. She certainly got both from me.

~Travis Rogers, Jr. is The Jazz Owl