

The Syncopated Times

Exploring the World of Hot Jazz, Ragtime, and Swing

[Home](#) ▾ [February 2024](#) ▾ [Features](#) ▾ [Columns](#) ▾ [Reviews](#) ▾ [Red Hot Jazz](#) ▾ [Events](#) [Log In](#) [Subscribe](#)



Judy Whitmore • Come Fly With Me

Dave Doyle | January 30, 2024 | Album Reviews



Over Christmas, I bought myself a new car. Well, nearly new—enough that I drive it everywhere like a partially-sighted senior, terrified of even the lightest contact with anything but fresh air. To help avoid any paintwork-punishing incidents, I've switched up my driving music: nu metal, classic jungle, and hot jazz are out; city pop, vaporwave, and sweet swing are in. Tempos faster than 120 bpm are banned from the in-car MP3 player, as are tracks featuring drum machines or Gene Krupa.

Under this new, authoritarian audio regime, Judy Whitmore's new album gets a pass from the Ministry of Motoring Music. *Come Fly With Me* could just as easily have been called *Come Drive With Me*, as it turns out its twelve tracks make ideal ear fodder for the kind of hectic highways encountered on a New Year's Day. There are no distractingly deep cuts on this disc, which features big band renditions of a dozen travel-themed standards: "April in Paris," "Moonlight in Vermont," and "Georgia on My Mind" join the title track and others, whisking the listener away on a low-stress, globe-trotting aural adventure.

At the fore is Whitmore: cabaret performer, recording artist, bestselling novelist, theater producer, licenced therapist, and a qualified commercial jet pilot. (Yes, really.) One might reasonably ask whether one person can actually be so talented. Well, I can only speak for the singing part, but she's got that down pat. Whitmore's gorgeous vocal style reminds me of my favorite actress, Martha Raye—think "Pig Foot Pete" in *Keep 'Em Flying* or "Watch the Birdie" in *Hellzapoppin'* (both 1941)—combining Broadway-like clarity with a charmingly rhotic, warm, unashamedly American tone.

The Renaissance woman is backed by a similarly talented group of players including no fewer than twenty violinists, six violists, and five cellists. Sharing accompaniment duties with the seven horn players, tracks like "Autumn in New York" see these string-slingers thickly arranged into sweeping orchestral waves befitting a new motor—even if it's only a tiny Kia. They don't appear on every tune though, as arrangements range from acoustic torch song to electric blues, making for a collection which surprises and delights from beginning to end, never growing dull—great if you happen to be cruising down the M6 on a rain-soaked winter's evening, when a cool-headed attentiveness is what you want your music to foster.

None of these arrangements is particularly radical—such experimentation would draw focus from Whitmore's beautiful voice—but there are moments apt to cock a head on one side. "Somewhere Beyond the Sea" boasts some curious chord changes, while "Come Fly With Me" has a touch of the chanson about it, thanks to Hendrik Meurkens' harmonica. The mouth organ is a criminally underrated jazz instrument which I'm always excited to hear on a record, and Meurkens doesn't disappoint.

The only track which disappointed me slightly was "Georgia on My Mind," one of my all-time favorites, which gets a soulful, Chicago-inspired arrangement here. It's nice, sure—particularly with Adam Aejay Jackson joining Whitmore for a duet vocal—but it's otherwise rather close to the Ray Charles version, when I would have liked to hear a more Carmichael-inspired take. The frequent key changes, the first of which comes half way through verse one, as Jackson chimes in, confuse me too: just as you're settling into one key, they go and change it. Couldn't they find one agreeable to both singers...?

It's a minor gripe about an otherwise very enjoyable album. *Come Fly With Me* is out now—see judywhitmore.com for more info, and hear a couple of samples by seeking her out on YouTube Music.

Come Fly With Me

Judy Whitmore

judywhitmore.com

Dave Doyle

Dave Doyle is a swing dancer, dance teacher, and journalist based in Gloucestershire, England. Write him at contact@davedoyle.co.uk. Find him on Twitter @DaveDoyleComms.