

DANCE

MAKING A SINATRA SONG DANCE TWYLA THARP CHOREOGRAPHS SEDUCTION.

BY REBECCA MILZOFF

ONE NIGHT IN 1982, Frank Sinatra approached choreographer Twyla Tharp in tears. He'd just seen *Nine Sinatra Songs*, the second of three dances she would set to his music. "Oh, I want to be a dancer," he moaned. "You've danced in a few of your films. You're not bad," she said—briefly consoling. "But don't quit your day job."

To have witnessed that: The peerless, suave Sinatra paying obsequious homage to the prickly, hard-to-impress Tharp. The two never became friends, but his music has remained a staple in Tharp's choreography—perhaps because Sinatra's style so epitomizes her own: equally relaxed and elegant, complex and natural, and entirely American.

This month, Tharp opens her fourth Broadway show *Come Fly Away*, a musical featuring four couples who meet, love, fight, break up, and make up to Sinatra songs. The most challenging to choreograph, says Tharp, is danced by Holley Farmer and John Selya. "I've Got a Crush on You" is the first of Farmer and Selya's duets together, and in just under five minutes you will see, says Tharp, why the slinky, icy Farmer has become the best partner she's found for her athletic male muse. Tharp specifically wanted to turn the iconic guy-to-girl love letter on its head—as in, advantage girl. "They're circling like a couple of wrestlers—both wish to be on the center mark, but of course you can't have that," says Tharp. "It's the beginning for them—the first time they touch, a statement of purpose. They want the same thing, which they see in each other's eyes." The simmering, deceptively minimalist number showcases a telling Tharp move: a twisting low lift in which Selya flips Farmer around his back and onto one knee. It ends with Selya clearly in thrall to Farmer, and literally at her feet. "I think Twyla likes that the woman's manipulating him," Selya says with a laugh. "She knows how hungry men are for women's approval." ■



Photomontage by Howard Schatz