

SWINGING ON SINATRA

Stars of Twyla Tharp's *Come Fly Away*, from left: Keith Roberts, Karine Plantadit, John Selya, and Holley Farmer, in New York City.



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carcely a minute into a studio run-through of the first act of *Come Fly Away*, Twyla Tharp's avidly awaited Broadway musical carousel based on the beltings of Frank Sinatra (opening March 25 at the Marquis Theatre), Tharp suddenly calls a time-out: in the initial flurry of dance-floor traffic, one of her male dancers has gotten bopped in the eye and is wobbling like Popeye without his sea legs. Tharp hurries over to check that the dancer hasn't been seriously harmed and returns to her chair to re-start the action from the top, remarking, "It's a football field out there." It is when Tharp is calling scrimmage, her playbook once again based on the Sinatra songbook, with its jet-age propulsions and after-hours regrets. (*Nine Sinatra Songs* and *Sinatra Suite* are two of her previous forays into Frankophilia.) Although the song list for *Come Fly Away* includes "Nice 'n' Easy," Tharp, like Tina Turner, never does it nice and easy. From ballet's *Push Comes to Shove* to Broadway's *Movin' Out*, she does it nice and rough. Her precisely calibrated choreographic skirmishing—with cocky shadowboxing and flirtatious sparring, slapstick pratfalls, Gene Kelly hat tricks, and daredevil feats (here, a leggy dame arrowing into a man's arms as he extricates himself from a jacket)—pushes dance into the danger zone where romance and roughhousing meet. Tharp has a cast that's in fighting trim, including Keith Roberts, John Selya, Karine Plantadit, and Ashley Tuttle from *Movin' Out*, and the proud-strutting Holley Farmer (formerly of Merce Cunningham's company), with a 19-piece band on stage supplying the artillery to the sound of Sinatra's original vocals. And if that doesn't pop a cherry into your Manhattan, baby, what will? —JAMES WOLCOTT