

## Come Fly Away, Marquis Theatre, New York

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Twyla Tharp imagines romance as a war of wills. Frank Sinatra injects even the most googly-eyed song with a strain of menace, as if he had fallen in love despite himself. The two are a perfect match, and Broadway's *Come Fly Away* proves it in startling fashion.



**Magnetism: Holley Farmer with John Selya (left) and Matthew Stockwell Dibble**

Tharp's third jukebox dancical has as much working against it as the heavy-handed *Movin' Out*, to Billy Joel tunes, and the Dylan flop that followed. The script amounts to a medley of songs, which Sinatra delivers on tape to the accompaniment of a live orchestra. The setting resembles a nightclub in an airport. The show doesn't really feature characters – we would need a plot for that – so much as romantic propensities. One couple gravitates towards innocent clownishness; another maintains a cool insouciance; a third begins with grandstanding and friskiness, detours into spirited S&M, and finishes off with the aqueous lovemaking that emerges from sleep.

And yet *Come Fly Away* far surpasses Tharp's other two Broadway shows because she has finally accepted what a song can do better than plot and character. In a seemingly casual arrangement of the most inventive dances she has created in years, the choreographer concentrates on metaphor, feeling and rhythm: poetry.

Perhaps to reassure the audience, the first act resorts to the usual Broadway tropes, but rendered with masterly precision. The eight leads don't just strike a pose when they saunter one by one down a staircase, they freeze on the hippest beat of the hopping "Come Fly With Me" as if a flashbulb had gone off.

By the second act, the dancers have stripped down to their underclothes and Tharp has relinquished the musclebound herky-jerkiness of Broadway dance for numbers that only these specific brilliant dancers – formerly of Ailey, Cunningham and American Ballet Theatre – could do.

She brings out the pathos in the ongoing feud between naughty, attention-hogging Kate (Karine Plantadit) and the infatuated Hank (Keith Roberts) by treating us to Roberts' elegant lyricism. The couple's final duet gains power from how unstopably, adorably egotistical Kate has been until now: to see her surrender to soft fluidity disarms us.

Meanwhile, Holley Farmer's sultriness would not provide such an oasis of calm if she acted sultry. Instead she simply dances with limpid, unhurried magnetism, and we are enthralled.

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