

THE THEATER REVIEW

A Swingin' Affair

Come Fly Away, Twyla Tharp's Sinatra dance musical, waltzes right up to the edge of being Vegas schlock. But the supreme dancers, along with Frank, keep it sublime.

By [Stephanie Zacharek](#) Published Mar 25, 2010

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(Photo: Joan Marcus)

Emediocre Frank Sinatra song—if there is such a thing—needs no adornment. If it's not such a good idea to go around dancing about architecture, isn't dancing about Sinatra just as bad a sin?

It should be. But there's nothing superfluous about *Come Fly Away*, choreographed and directed by Twyla Tharp, a show that teases new secrets out of songs many of us feel we already know intimately—suddenly, it seems as if there have always been dances inside “Moonlight Becomes You” and “Summer Wind,” crying to get out. Tharp has built shows around Sinatra before, and the singer himself once told her, “You give me class.” Tharp now returns the compliment, using a selection of his master recordings as the basis for a gorgeously seamless narrative, set in a nightclub, following four sets of lovers as they couple, uncouple, and recouple. The dancers' characters have retro-hipster names like “Sid” and “Babe,” and they're dressed to match: sharkskin suits that hint at the notion of Charles Atlas muscles beneath, draped cocktail dresses that capture the aura of fifties glamour couture, although they ripple instead of rustle. The whole shebang is augmented by a nineteen-piece big band (plus a singer) assembled onstage, bearing witness to the proceedings like a swinging Greek chorus.

The spectacle is overwhelming at first. But then the too-muchness of it all hits the groove of just-rightness, thanks to the splendor of Tharp's dancers. Karine Plantadit's Kate is a feral nightlife hottie: In “Learnin' the Blues,” she shows off Mack the Knife thigh muscles that, miraculously, enhance her slinky eroticism instead of contradicting it. Babe (Holley Farmer) is the smoldering redheaded bombshell, an object of desire perched on killer stems, but there's a winning sweetness about her, too: Her most suggestive hip rolls are more saucy than salacious. Babe looks on, with amorous approval, as her partner, Sid (John Selya), performs a solitary, mournful dance to “September of My Years.” Selya has a slightly thicker (but no less muscular) trunk than the other male dancers—a sturdy soccer player's build rather than a track star's—and he imparts the illusion of middle-aged chunkiness. This is a dance made up of memories rather than plans, an ode to abs gone by, but there's joyousness in it too: Here's a guy reflecting on a lifetime of sensuality rather than worrying about hair loss or failed hydraulics. His dance, and the show around it, suggest that bodies remember things our minds are likely to forget, and they hold songs inside them, too.

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