

# ‘Come Fly’ gives voice to Sinatra

Actually it's his voice, with a live band, in this Tharp tribute

NEW YORK — It's hard to imagine a Broadway show delivering a more dazzling combination of talent than *Come Fly With Me* (★★★ out of four), the Frank Sinatra tribute that opened Thursday at the Marquis Theatre.



**Sinatra:** Vocals from master recordings.

**Stage review**  
By Elysa Gardner

Conceived, choreographed and directed with characteristic dynamism by Twyla Tharp, this homage features the spine-tingling arrangements of Sinatra's best-loved recordings, zestfully revived by an expert live band. Tharp's dancers, too — playing couples who grapple with that tender trap called love — mix technical prowess with a visceral punch that can be as playful as it is poignant.

And of course, *Come Fly With Me*



By Joan Marcus, The Hartman Group, via AP

**Come dance with me:** Holley Farmer and John Selya share the spotlight in Twyla Tharp's homage to Ol' Blue Eyes.

has Sinatra himself — or his voice, at least. While Tharp used other singers to re-create Billy Joel and Bob Dylan tunes in 2002's *Movin' Out* and 2006's *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, she knew better than to simulate the most distinctive pop voice of the

20th century. So Sinatra's vocals, taken from masters provided by his estate, are piped in over the orchestra.

But Ol' Blue Eyes' boundless expressivity actually makes him a tricky subject for this approach. In concert and in the studio, Sinatra was

an instinctively interactive artist; he engaged the band and the listener, making us believe that songs were vital forms of communication rather than just vehicles for crooners. To hear that voice superimposed on music played more than a decade af-

ter his death, however faithfully to the original orchestrations, seems at odds with this whole sensibility.

It doesn't help that Peter McBoyle's sound design sometimes places the recorded vocals too far back in the mix, or that a live female singer intermittently pops up to reinforce their canned quality. (The tangy-voiced Hilary Gardner performed elegantly at a recent preview. Another singer and alternate principal dancers are featured at Wednesday and Saturday matinees.)

The dancing, luckily, captures the easy wit and emotional range that made Sinatra at once a great communicator and a peerless musical actor. Two of the most affecting numbers were adapted from 1982's *Nine Sinatra Songs*, one of several previous Tharp pieces featuring his music. In a titillating *That's Life*, Karine Plantadit and Keith Roberts athletically relay a fine line between passion and brutality; a plaintive *One for My Baby* showcases the same dancers, now deflated but grasping for solace.

Laura Mead and Charlie Neshyba-Hodges have some wonderfully spry moments as a more innocent, comic couple, while Holley Farmer plays limber glamour girl to the ruggedly lyrical John Selya, who has a moving solo turn accompanying *September of My Years*.

Tharp finds inspiration even in Sinatra's less-stellar material: That old chestnut *New York, New York* becomes an exuberant finale — a fitting end to a show that, though less than the sum of its glorious parts, is buoyed by its subject's inimitable spirit.