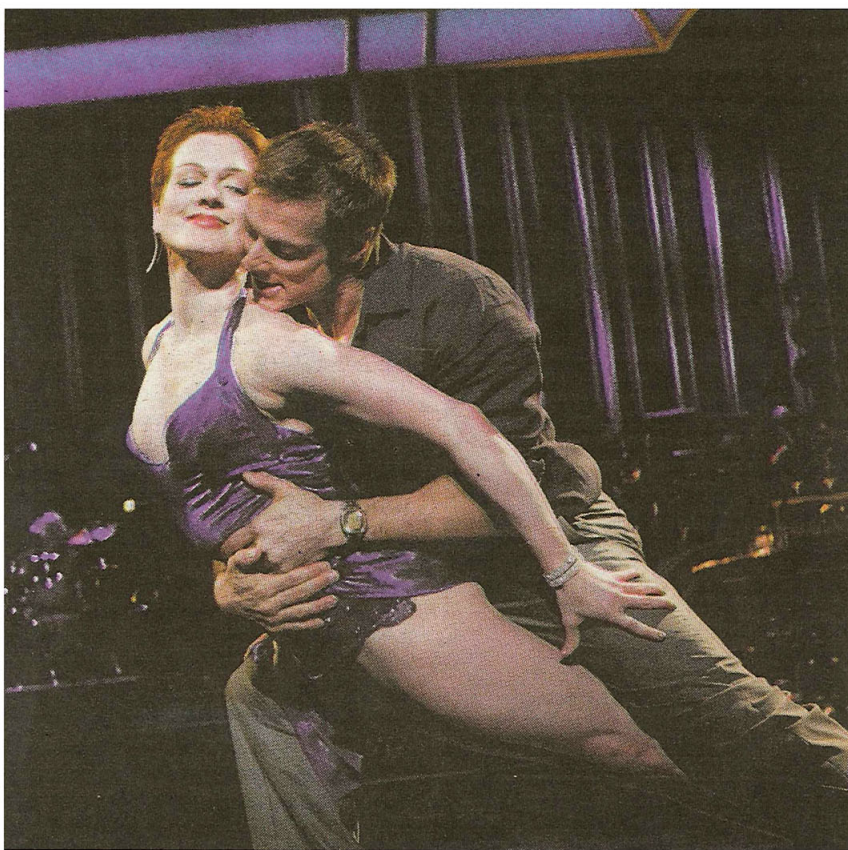


MARCH 31–APRIL 6, 2010

Dance



Joan Marcus

Come Fly Away

By Twyla Tharp and Frank Sinatra
Marquis Theatre
1535 Broadway, 212-307-4100

The Chairman of the boards: Holley Farmer and John Selya do up Frank.

Kassoff is live, it's Sinatra's inimitable voice that purls out, resurrected from the vinyl recordings we played to death. On the bandstand, the fine singer Hilary Gardner occasionally takes over or joins him. Tharp has keyed the choreography to the songs in mostly oblique ways, but now and then the obvious connection pays off. In the first engagingly naïve encounter between Marty (Charlie Neshyba-Hodges), the busboy, and Betsy (Laura Mead), a sweet young thing, he's so excited that he trips, almost drops her several times, and tangles with her on the floor. The song? "Let's Fall in Love."

Tharp built her great show *Movin' Out* on Billy Joel songs. They gave her all the elements she needed for a gripping scenario to reveal through dancing: love, restlessness, war, trauma, drug addiction. *Come Fly Away*, like *Movin' Out*, has no spoken dialogue—only an occasional epithet. Unlike that musical, it doesn't have a through-line spread over several years, and the subject of almost every song is the often boulder-strewn road to love. To love *Come Fly Away* yourself, you have to accept it as a series of vignettes—brilliantly layered within an ensemble ambience—about couples without backstories meeting, making out, parting, and perhaps finding new sweethearts.

The greatest pleasure is the choreography that conveys the emotional flare-ups and elevates them beyond recognizable behavior (kissing, turning away, raising a hand in anger). The musical lilt and swoop and twist and spin of the dancing alters with the changing moods. Complicated maneuvers between partners can convey desire or love or rage—as in the terrific "That's Life," in which long-suffering Hank (the superb Keith Roberts) finally gives his date, the do-me party girl Kate (Karine Plantadit), the tough treatment she's maybe been asking for. A multiple pirouette can bespeak rapture or frustration.

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And what performers! Neshyba-Hodges isn't only a virtuosic acrobat-dancer, he's a fine comic actor. As warmly seductive Babe, ex-Merce Cunningham dancer Holley Farmer looks as if she'd been born to wear high heels and a slinky blue dress and enjoy the company of worshipful men. The brilliant Plantadit comes daringly close to going over the top in tigerishness as she plays the superb Roberts against the three willing men of the ensemble and flashes her gorgeous legs around. Dapper Matthew Stockwell Dibble (Chanos), forsaken by Babe and comforted by the impish Slim (Rika Okamoto), does an amazing drunken solo. John Selya as the sweet-natured Sid, who craves (and gets) Babe, anchors the whole piece—and not just in his full-bodied, profoundly musical, emotionally charged solo to "September of My Years" or in his hopeful duets with Farmer. He acknowledges the musicians while chatting with bartending Vico (Alexander Brady); he acknowledges us in a relaxed and ingratiating way; and he watches and reacts to everything. The three men and three women of the ensemble are all splendid.

Tharp and the performers have created a complex and believable ambience, with a great deal of flirtatious or comradely by-play, silent conversing, and solitary drinking. To provide a contrast not inherent in the playlist, she unbuttons the decorum and the costumes for Act II. While we've been having an intermission, the denizens of the club have been doing some serious drinking. They've removed bits of their clothing and continue to shed inhibitions. (The lighting is so red, blue, and shadowy that you mightn't notice Plantadit making out with ensemble dancer Carolyn Doherty just below the band.)

In the end, however, lovers and friends have sorted things out, and all swirl into Sinatra's climactic, life-affirming rendition of "My Way," with the women lifted and the very idea of joy and confidence soaring with them. I would have been happy to have *Come Fly Away* end in that suddenly starry night, but we're on Broadway, and watching dancers spell each other in the spotlight while Sinatra sings "New York, New York" lets us feel a part of their prowess as artists in our city.

Under Her Skin

On Broadway, Twyla Tharp gets a kick out of Sinatra

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

In 1982, Twyla Tharp choreographed *Nine Sinatra Songs*. To recordings by "Old Blue Eyes," pair after pair of her unforgettable company members, wearing fancy clothes by Oscar de la Renta, danced alone onstage. In *Come Fly Away*, the exhilarating musical that she conceived, choreographed, and directed (now playing at Broadway's Marquis Theatre), two of those duets and a host of new ones go public: These performers while away the night together at a decidedly uptown club. Picked out by the moody beams of Donald Holder's lighting, everything glitters: the glasses arrayed above scenic designer James Youmans's bar; the saxes, trumpets, and trombones on the upstage bandstand; the touches of silver in Katherine Roth's costumes; and, above all, the extraordinary dancers. When they enter via a staircase, a spotlight acknowledges them as the stars they are.

Although the band conducted by Russ