

## 'Come Fly Away': Coach aspiring to reach first class

BY PETER MARKS

NEW YORK — That voice. Those bodies.

The most easily accessed pleasures of "Come Fly Away" — Frank Sinatra's gorgeous phrasings, the dancers' gorgeous spins — are the major selling points of choreographer Twyla Tharp's latest Broadway venture, a night of exhilarating though repetitious exertions to the tunes of "That's Life," "Makin' Whoopee" and "My Funny Valentine."

Dozens of other Sinatra classics — accompanied by a live 18-piece band and a female vocalist — are piped into the Marquis Theatre over the course of the two-hour show, which had its official opening Thursday night. The production's cabaret trimmings give the proceedings the veneer of a high-end nightclub act, and that's what "Come Fly Away" feels like, although Tharp attempts to inject a little touristy, Broadway glitz.

Less successfully than in "Mo-



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**TAKING OFF:** Holley Farmer and John Selya in Twyla Tharp's "Come Fly Away" at Broadway's Marquis Theatre. The choreographer builds a series of numbers around Frank Sinatra hits.

vin' Out," her rock-and-roll Vietnam War ballet, Tharp lassoes together a series of numbers to create a rudimentary plot. In that earlier hit show, she had the song-

book of Billy Joel to build on, and that singer-songwriter infuses his lyrics with storytelling potential galore. (Some of Joel's songs, such as "Scenes From an Italian Restaurant," are virtual musicals unto themselves.)

But the Sinatra show is gleaned from the music of oodles of contributors, from Cole Porter ("I've Got You Under My Skin") to Johnny Mercer ("Summer Wind"), and so the production's narrative binding feels weaker. A result is that the choreographic inspiration loses its bewitching power as the night goes on. It turns out that when jete-ing to Ol' Blue Eyes's manly baritone, you can raise goose bumps only so many times.

Still, Tharp has assembled a remarkable corps of principal dancers, and if you think of "Come Fly Away" as no more than a recital, an extension of her past efforts to set torsos in motion to Sinatra's voice, you'll have a merry time. (If only the show didn't end with numbers that feel as if they're forever on a tape loop: the terminally kitschy "My Way" and the anthem booming over the sound system in every deli and barbershop, "New York, New York.")

The conceit is that we're in a club whose onstage denizens catch one another's eyes and pair off. Their gyrations are all about seduction and flirtation. A nebishy waiter (the startlingly gymnastic Charlie Neshyba-Hodges) awkwardly courts a fresh-faced ingenue (Laura Mead), while a Gene Kelly type in "Mad Men" silk suit and skinny tie (John Selya) makes time with an ultra-leggy socialite (Holley Farmer). They

get all hot and bothered, naturally, to "I've Got a Crush on You."

The breakout soloist is a dynamo named Karine Plantadit, a dancer with the physical grace of Cyd Charisse and the spitfire energy of Tina Turner. At the end of Act 1, she and the others perform the production's most imaginative riffs, in the jazzy "Jumpin' at the Woodside."

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Apropos of not much, the nimble Selya does a bit of break dancing late in the second act, an indication that the frisky "Come Fly Away" is not above vamping to justify its running time — and the liberties it takes with yours.

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#### COME FLY AWAY

conceived, choreographed and directed by Twyla Tharp. Set, James Youmans; costumes, Katherine Roth; lighting, Donald Holder; sound, Peter McBoyle; music supervisor, Patrick Vaccariello. With Keith Roberts, Matthew Stockwell Dibble, Rika Okamoto. About two hours. At the Marquis Theatre, 1535 Broadway, New York. Call 877-250-2929 or visit [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).