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SIMPLY BRILLIANT: The cast of *The Temperamentals*, now playing at New World Stages

Photo: Joan Marcus

*Theater Review*

# **Simplicity, great cast make *The Temperamentals* a must-see**

**The Temperamentals**

**Written by Jon Marans**

**Directed by Jonathan Silverstein**

**New World Stages**

**340 West 50th Street**

**New York, N.Y.**

**(212-239-6200), [www.thetemperamentals.com](http://www.thetemperamentals.com)**

**By David NouNou**

In a season that is teeming with gay-themed plays, *The Temperamentals* is a true standout. Its uniqueness lies in its simplicity. It tells a story with no gimmicks, and it believes in what it has to say. One has to remember that this show takes place in an era before AIDS, the Stonewall riots, or gay-party-themed plays with an assortment of people to show the spectrum and variety of the homosexual male. It was in a time of conformity and barely being allowed to exist.

The place is Los Angeles. The time is the early 1950s, in an age of strict moral order. Suits and ties are the norm, and a way of blending into a heterosexual world. In order to climb up the corporate ladder, a gay male either has to be married or be in the company of a woman. Gay exhibition is not a part of the landscape yet. The setting is an empty stage with three walls and six metal chairs that are moved around as the play progresses. The main characters are Harry Hay, a married man and a communist (Thomas Jay Ryan) and Rudi Gernreich, the future world-renowned fashion designer (Michael Urie). They are the founding fathers of the Mattachine Society; hardly your typical blend to start a group. Their dialogue has an ambiguous beginning. Are these two men flirting? Is it a power struggle for dominance over each other? In part it is a coded language of the gay society, then known as "temperamentals," and in part the start of their own personal relationship. They are developing their manifesto for the new order of gay existence and rights and their endeavors of recruiting new members, such as the likes of famed director Vincent Minnelli, and others.

Michael Urie, better known for his role on TV's "Ugly Betty" is remarkable as Viennese-Jewish immigrant and designer Rudy Gernreich, replete with accent and style. He has an incredible stage presence and grasp of character. Thomas Jay Ryan has the more difficult role as the bullish Harry Hay, the organizer of the Society. He is skillful in his portrayal.

The multitude of characters, from Vincent Minnelli, Bob Hall, Dale Jennings and others are expertly portrayed by Arnie Burton, Matthew Schneck and Sam Breslin Wright. Jonathan Silverstein's direction is truly adept and seamless in moving his cast from scene to scene. In its minimalism and directness, he adds the essential elements to make *The Temperamentals* an interesting and thought-provoking evening in the theater.