



Far left: Playwright Day; *Straight-Jacket* cast members (from left) Ron Mathews, Paul Michael Valley (since replaced by John Littlefield), and Stevie Ray Dallimore

bly glamorous movie star, and he had a big obstacle toward love in his life because he was forced to marry." In Day's lighthearted homage to those movies, the playboy hunk comes out of the closet, discovers true love, escapes the tentacles of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's committee, and lands a coveted leading role as well.

Writing about covert sexuality in 1950s Hollywood invites comparisons to the situation in the showbiz capital today, and, according to Day, "it's still going on in many ways." All the actors in *Straight-Jacket*, it turns out, are heterosexual. "Gay actors selected themselves out of the audition process," he says. "They just won't go up for gay roles because they're terrified they will get to play only the gay sidekick and never get taken seriously as a star."

What's more, in trying to set up

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Looking into Rock's closet

TV exec Richard Day turns playwright with a tale of a closeted '50s star who's ordered to wed a woman **By Gerard Raymond**

A 1950s Hollywood leading man marries a studio owner's secretary in order to maintain a heterosexual facade. Sound familiar? That's the premise of Richard Day's *Straight-Jacket*, a new off-Broadway comedy that opened in New York in June.

You can guess the real-life inspiration for the play—but in the case of Rock Hudson, he was forced to marry his agent's secretary. "In some perverse way, the Rock Hudson story is the perfect Rock Hudson movie, if you could have made it then," says first-time playwright Day, who honed his comedy chops over the past decade writing and producing TV hits including *The Drew Carey Show*, *Ellen*, *Mad About You*, *The Larry Sanders Show*,

and, most recently, Michael J. Fox's final season of *Spin City*.

Day has always been fascinated with the bedroom farces Hudson made with costar Doris Day, starting with *Pillow Talk* in 1959. These movies followed one successful formula, Day explains: "A ne'er-do-well bachelor in an impossibly glamorous job meets the one woman who could elevate him, basically to monogamy. But there's some obstacle that prevents him from getting to her. The whole movie is how he gets around that. He just wants to sleep with her. She not only relents but also gets him to accept her values."

In reality, Day reminds, Hudson's situation was the exact opposite. "In real life Rock Hudson was an impossi-

films Day learned that straight actors who win acclaim in plum gay roles get nervous the second time around. "You hear 'Oh, he's already played gay' as the reason they are declining. It's such an absurd answer, as if you get to do only one [gay role], and then you've used up your coupon!"

Still, Day points out, some things have changed. When the 38-year-old Northern California native started working in television in 1987, he felt like an outsider in a very exclusive club. "You'd be in this room with 13 white men smoking cigars, talking about women and sports," Day says. "They knew I was gay and seemed fine with it, but I'd get this backward compliment: 'Well, you don't act gay.'" But with the advent of stars like Roseanne, Day says, the door opened to women writers—and to gay comedy writers as well. "At this point," he insists, "it's no big deal being a gay writer. If anything, it's an asset." ■

Raymond has contributed to The Village Voice and Harper's Bazaar.