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## ***A CurtainUp* Report**

# **2004 New York International Fringe Festival**

by [Les Gutman](#), [David Lipfert](#), [Brad Bradley](#), [Jenny Sandman](#), [Amanda Cooper](#), [Kathryn Osenlund](#), [Simon Saltzman](#) and Doug Cote

### ***Simple Thoughts***

Fans of Langston Hughes, the wonderful African-American writer who was adept in a variety of literary genres, theatrically enjoyed his centenary a couple of years ago with the Amas Theater's fine musical adaptation of his *Little Ham*. Fringe followers this year have a chance to see a fine dramatization of Hughes's popular Everyman character Jesse B. Semple, known by the shorthand name of "Simple." Simple, a dramatic cousin to Little Ham, is a kind of spokesperson for Harlem, and the action of the drama is set in a jazz-inflected bar around and following World War II. A homespun philosopher, Simple refers to himself as "a colored Indian," and declaims that "Harlem is a state of mind." A surprising antiwar prayer heard at the end of the performance gives the work added timeliness. This fine presentation, by the Twilight Repertory Company from Charlotte, North Carolina, has been adapted and directed by James Vesce. Several performers from that city remain in the New York Fringe version, notably including the remarkable sight-impaired performer Calvin Thompson in the key title role. Also impressive in the cast are Lamont Bryant in two vastly different roles, and J. Morong as an outspoken bartender. Mr. Vesce also has created an elaborate sound design for the show, which effectively uses music as well as narrative voice-over to enhance his theatrical collage's aural texture. At Connelly Theater. 1 hour. [Bradley]