

## The Advocate

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Damon Wayans has a new therapist, and he's gay. On the hit series *My Wife and Kids*, now in its second season on ABC, Wayans and TV bride Tisha Campbell-Martin have been searching for the right shrink. It seems they've found one in out actor-comic Jason Stuart. Stuart, whose character appeared in a single episode last season, has been asked to portray the therapist as a recurring role.

□The show is a family show, and I think they needed some spice in the oat-meal," says Stuart. "They needed something to jazz up the show to get different kinds of viewers."

With Stuart's episodes airing during the critical period of May sweeps, a gay therapist could be just what the ratings doctor ordered. Yet one can't help but wonder if Stuart's therapist will be subjugated to the same stereotypical (albeit hilarious) brand of humor Wayans displayed with his outrageously fey "Men on Film" characters on *In Living Color*.

Stuart, who paid his dues as an openly gay stand-up comic, understands breaking the rules of political correctness for comedy. "It was very stereotypical," Stuart says in acknowledging Wayans's portrayal of gays. "But if you look at the show, that's everything that they did. When they did the Homeboy Shopping Network, the black community went nuts. They skewered everyone."

Stuart and Wayans met when starting out in stand-up. "We auditioned for the Comedy Store the same night," says Stuart. "So I've known him 18 years. Since we were babies. I used to drive him home because he didn't have a car." When it came to casting the gay therapist Wayans immediately thought of his old friend. Stuart proudly notes, "I didn't audition for this part. I was offered it."

He's also happy with the development of the character and his sexuality. "This guy is really sweet, and he really, really wants to help people. But he can't stop talking about his own relationship," Stuart explains. "It was wonderfully written and I've done a lot of sitcoms." Stuart's done a lot of television, period. He's been seen on Charmed, Providence, Three Sisters, The Drew Carey Show, and is set for an upcoming guest appearance on Will & Grace. But he concedes that getting work hasn't always been easy. "When I was 16 and I started going to the studios and dropping off my pictures, people dismissed me," he remembers. "They didn't know what to do with somebody like me. It was very difficult."

When asked about the pitfalls of coming out professionally, the comic gets serious. "There have been days when I thought, Why did I do this? This is so hard. And people have been so mean to me, especially the club owners. Being an openly gay person is so complicated. The hardest thing is that a lot of the gay parts go to straight people. At least let me have those parts."

But Stuart never considered hiding behind a heterosexual persona. "Paul Lynde and Charles Nelson Reilly broke the glass then," he says. "I want to break the glass ceiling now. I want to be a character actor that plays all different kinds of parts. I'd like to win an Academy Award for playing a straight guy and get onstage and thank my husband. The only thing is, I need to have a husband to thank."

Kaye is an independent writer-producer for television and film.