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Gay Comedy Without a Dress

Jason Stuart Self-distributed \$15

As the title of his CD, *Gay Comedy Without a Dress* suggests, stand-up comic Jason Stuart knows the difference between being laughed with and laughed at. Culled from the appearances at the Acme Comedy Co. in Minneapolis, Stuart's CD shows just how far that out gays and lesbians have come in the field of entertainment: They no longer need to don the proverbial dress and camp it up to get the laughs. In mining his own experiences for material, Stuart- an openly gay actor who has appeared on *The Drew Carey Show* and *Will and Grace*- manages to find his audience's common denominators. While the key to Jason Stuart's appeal is his ability to cross over to a wider audience without alienating anyone, gay or straight, in the process, it also doesn't hurt that he's funny as hell.

Stuart wastes no time digging into his routine, going from zero to frantic in six seconds flat. Over the course of an hour Stuart barely allows the audience time to catch its breath. Some of his material is universal - his trials with his family or his religion - while other aspects of his show rely on an exclusively gay spin. When relating how his brother asked him "what role he plays" in his same-sex relationships, Stuart quips, "I'm Patty Duke in the *Miracle Worker*."

At a few points during his act Stuart name-checks the gay canon - for instance, clicking his heels and blurting "There's no place like home, there's no place like home." when he feigns exasperation with the crowd. the comic is at his sharpest when he goes off the script and interacts with the crowd. His remarks about others are stinging without being mean-spirited, and his jabs at himself are self-deprecating without sounding bitter.

Unfortunately, when compared to the fresh angle with which he approaches the rest of his material, the nods to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Judy Garland* seem perfunctory and listless. Stuart is funny enough without having to rely on such clichés.