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By Gerry Desautels

Provincetown Banner Correspondent

It's only natural that Jason Stuart, the first openly gay comedian to headline in Las Vegas, would land a summer gig in Provincetown. A crazy, affable and sensitive New Yorker, now living in Los Angeles, this seasoned comic could very well be on the verge of a fulltime acting career to rival his 20 years of high energy in standup comedy.

'I saw Siegfried and Roy in Vegas,' quips Stuart. 'I spent \$150 bucks to see their show and all I saw was these big white tigers and cod pieces ... I could walk down Commercial Street and see that for free!' This image is followed by Stuart's revelation that 'There are 10 guys in Provincetown, and they have all the jobs. They're like Sam Drucker in 'Petticoat Junction' (who ran the local general store and held about a dozen other jobs and public service positions).

Stuart has wasted no time developing Provincetown standup material around various trials he's faced during his two short weeks in town. He relates incredulously about sharing a '\$9,000 11-week rental closet with another performer,' and shares his compulsory experience with registering as a 'Solicitor' with Provincetown officials in order to legally distribute show flyers on Commercial Street. The outgoing, flirtatious and borderline crass Stuart admits he had apprehension around the 'Provincetown tradition' of hawking flyers by day to attract audiences by night. If my 30 minutes with Stuart on Commercial Street was any indication, he is well over any such anxiety as he shouts out to unsuspecting tourists in Whaler's Wharf, 'Hey you, gay guys, take my flyer. See my show tonight.' Bewildered and taken aback, some tourists ignore Stuart entirely, while he ekes a smile and interest from others, and meets a few townies along the way.

On stage during his show, his delivery is not for the slow-paced or hypersensitive. He ridicules unsuspecting audience members, gay and straight, with a fiery speed only a native New Yorker could master.

Sometimes mocking, sometimes scathing, Stuart strives to keep his audience laughing constantly throughout his hour-long show. A scrappy comedic survivor, he is quick and prone to self-deprecation if a line flops but nonetheless forgiving of himself, moving on to another one-liner or sharp, insightful commentary, drawing on his 38 years of wisdom. There is plenty of time for interaction by bolder audience members in an open Q&A session that rounds out Stuart's nightly shtick. This improvisational and playful forum is a chance to challenge and banter with this quick-witted fast talker.

Stuart's comedy runs the gay gamut from politics ('if they let us marry each other, we'll stop marrying you') to sex ('I read in the paper the other that day one percent of the country is gay. If that's true, I've slept with everyone!') to colorful family snapshots of his divorced parents, mom Gloria and father Lenny, who remarried a much younger woman 'a 12-year-old'!

A self-described actor and comedian, Stuart has lately become one of the top openly gay performers leading him to some of the country's best comedy clubs The Comedy Store and Improv to name just a couple. His colorful career has brought him acclaim through hard work and high-profile performances like Comedy Central's 'Out There in Hollywood.' As an actor he's appeared in big studio comedies such as 'Vegas Vacation,' and 'Kindergarten Cop.' Last year he completed the Disney comedy 'Ghost of a Chance' opposite Scott Bakula, and the Indie film 'Dawg' with Dennis Leary and Elizabeth Hurley. His manic TV acting resume included a role in the HBO film 'Gia' with Angelina Jolie and guest roles (gay and straight) on 'The Drew Carey Show,' 'Norm,' 'Three Sisters,' 'Providence' and 'Will & Grace.'

This summer Stuart awaits the release of '10 Attitudes,' his first starring role directed by good friend and Emmy-winner Michael Gallant. The film, a romantic gay comedy about looking for love in the new millennium, features Stuart in the lead with many of his personal friends sharing the limelight Alexandra Paul (Bay Watch), Judy Tenuta 'multi-media Bondage Goddess' and Jim J. Bullock (Monroe on 'Too Close for Comfort'). '10 Attitudes' was recently chosen to be part of the Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival July 10th and The Austin Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival Sept. 4th.

Stuart will steal away from his Jungle Cabaret show long enough to make appearances at both festivals to bookend his time in Provincetown.

A former 'Star Search' comedy category winner, Stuart chose to come out nationally just seven years ago on the 'Geraldo' show. Unlike some openly gay comics who trash closeted Hollywood celebrities, Stuart preaches understanding with a dash of sarcasm, versus the outright outing of his fellow actors. Undoubtedly, Stuart maintains this sensitivity and respect from the tribulations he experienced growing up gay, Jewish and closeted while struggling to break into the rough and tumble world of show biz comedy. As a budding comic, Stuart credits many familiar greats with inspiring his craft including Lucille Ball, Lily Tomlin, Joan Rivers, Totie Fields, Sandra Bernhard and Richard Pryor.

'My purpose, first and foremost, is to entertain,' says Stuart, 'and second, to educate if I can. There are all sorts of people who want to see their experiences, hopes and dreams portrayed on stage. Being out is a community effort. Everyone needs to support each other.' Besides getting a laugh a minute from most audience members (gay, straight and lesbian), Stuart also uses his comedy to convey eye-opening, life-learned lessons about homosexuality. 'The minute I come on stage, it's an educational experience for the audience, and me.' Stuart speaks jokingly of an aborted attempt to come to Provincetown six years ago when another venue in town rejected him. Bravely, Stuart visited Provincetown over the past New Year holiday and fell in love with the town he likens to stepping out on to a Universal Studios lot. 'I knew I had to come,' says Stuart. And so he did, only six years later. With an aggressive agent and more notoriety and clout under his belt, Stuart drove cross-country from L.A. with his best friend, following in the footsteps of friend and colleague comedienne Georgia Ragsdale, who also worked at the Jungle Cabaret two seasons ago. The show's name is 'Gay Comedy Without a Dress?' Stuart christened both his Provincetown show and new comedy CD with the title because, he says, 'I've always been a fan of drag. ... Jackie Beat, Lipsynka, Varla Jean Merman. I also love my lesbian sisters like

Suzanne Westenhoffer and Kate Clinton, but I have to admit I'm still a little afraid of Lea DeLaria.'

As for the summer in Provincetown, Stuart's personal expectations are limited and reasonable. He just 'wants a guy who has a car and doesn't live in it.'