

Gaywatch: Funny guy Jason Stuart
By Christine Champagne

Jason Stuart winds up in bed with Damon Wayans in an upcoming episode of ABC's "My Wife and Kids." But it's not what you think. Really.

Those of you who watch the sitcom will recall that Stuart — known as an actor and a comedian — appeared on "My Wife and Kids" back in January as Dr. Steven Michael Thomas, the openly gay psychiatrist who counseled Michael (Wayans) and his wife Janet (Tisha Campbell). The role was supposed to be a one-shot deal. But the good doctor proved so popular that the show's producers brought Dr. Thomas back as a recurring character.

Stuart resumes the role on the Wednesday, April 3 show (airing at 8 p.m. ET). The episode finds Dr. Thomas treating the Kyles again. It seems Michael thinks the family isn't spending enough quality time together. Dr. Thomas suggests they play games, so the Kyle family goes home and tackles Twister. Michael hurts his back and winds up in bed unable to move. Janet is convinced that Michael's injury is psychosomatic and calls upon Dr. Thomas to mend her bed-ridden husband. "So if you want to see me in bed with Damon Wayans, watch," Stuart says, laughing.

Stuart's character has a partner on the show, although we have not seen him. "Tell everybody to write to ABC and say that I should come back next season with a boyfriend," encourages Stuart, who's openly gay. And whom would Stuart cast in the role? "Esai Morales from 'NYPD Blue' is my fantasy," he says, adding, "But I'd like to have a real gay guy in the role."

Who knows? Stuart's wish could come true. The producers of "My Wife and Kids" are apparently interested in developing his character and have asked for his input. Stuart certainly appreciates the interest. "You have to realize what's happening here is really rare. I am an openly

gay man playing an openly gay character on a network television show in the family hour," Stuart says, "and I think it's no mistake that it's a black family."

According to Stuart, Wayans — who is one of the series' co-creators and executive producers — is a forward thinker. "I think Damon is probably one of the smartest guys in television because he sees what's happening, and he knows having something more diversified on his show is going to give it a longer life," Stuart says. "It's going to open it up to more kinds of people."

Aside from "My Wife and Kids," you'll also be able to see Stuart on the Thursday, May 2 episode of NBC's "Will & Grace" (airing at 9 p.m. EST), in which he reprises the role of Stuart, the high-strung manager and emcee of the club where Jack (Sean Hayes) performs. (Stuart also played the role of Stuart — no, that's not a typo — last season.) Stuart likens the experience of being on "Will & Grace" to being on "Survivor," because "they cut the show so much. If your scenes stay in, you're very lucky."

But "Survivor" is one show Stuart has no interest in doing. "By the time you're done with it, you're so exhausted, and you look so bad. No makeup. No hair people. ... I couldn't do it. I'm not interested in anything that's real. Reality television: it's too real."

How about appearing on a show like "Queer as Folk" then, with its excellent makeup and wardrobe people? "They wouldn't read me for anything. I was too old, and not a Canadian," he cracks.

Not that Stuart needs "Queer as Folk" anyway. His resume includes an extensive list of TV credits, including stints on "Providence," "Charmed" and "The Drew Carey Show." He also appeared in the HBO film "Gia."

Stuart tackles his first lead role in a feature film in the upcoming "10 Attitudes," a romantic comedy about looking for love in Los Angeles. And he recently optioned the book "Wisecracker" by William J. Mann,

which tells the story of Billy Haines, the first openly gay silent film star.

There was a time when Stuart fancied himself the next Robert DeNiro. “But it wasn’t going to happen, so I let it go and just put one foot in front of the other,” he says. “It’s not easy for gay people. I mean, just to get support from your own community is sometimes hard.”

But Stuart has managed to carve out a successful career for himself in the industry, and if all goes well, maybe he’ll even be back on “My Wife and Kids” next season — with a boyfriend. “Get together a letter-writing campaign! You have the power,” he says. So he’d really like to continue on with the show? “You’ve gotta ask me? My God!”