

Dot Newsmagazine  
celebrity interview

# Jason Stuart & Wilson Cruz

These two openly gay actors meet up on a coffee date with dot Newsmagazine to discuss their amazing careers, typecasting, 'coming out' and their exciting new film release of *Coffee Date* in November

By Gil Kaan

Gay indie film *Coffee Date* is already earning its place on the silver screen after only a few film festival stints. In learning more about the film, dot Newsmagazine also forges the opportunity to learn more about the showbiz life and personal adventures of the very hot Wilson Cruz and the very funny Jason Stuart.

*Coffee Date*, opening in theaters Friday, Nov. 10, centers around the life-changing consequences affecting Todd, a recently divorced straight office worker, when his brother sets him up with a blind date, named Kelly.

Unbeknownst to all involved, Kelly is a guy, deliciously played by Cruz.

Cruz, who has been "out" publicly since his first television gig as the gay teenager Rickie Vasquez on *My So-Called Life*, found a few similar qualities between Kelly and himself. Wilson finds both outgoing and considers them to be good friends, unapologetic about their sexuality, and possessing the tendency to fall in love easily.

"I tend to do that," said Cruz, ruefully.

On the other hand, Stuart believes he's nothing like his character Clayton. Todd's very "out" co-worker wistfully hopes that Todd is actually gay.

"But then, Clayton thinks everybody's gay!" Stuart quipped. "He has a boring relationship. I don't have that. I'm holding out for that terrific guy. He doesn't really listen and I think I'm a really good listener. Although we're both funny."

On the subject of seducing straight guys, Cruz believes he and his character also agree.

"I have nothing for straight guys," Cruz said. "I don't think Kelly has an attraction to straight guys. I think this just happened. As far as I'm concerned, the minute I hear someone's straight, my boner's gone-gone! That's a complete turnoff to me."

Cruz's love scene with Todd, played by Jonathan Bray, wasn't as much scripted as it was directed on the spot.

"I think it was awkward for both of us," Cruz said. "Jonathan was very sweet and nervous. It was really awkward for him and it made it awkward for me. This was actually my first love scene. I'd never done one before."

Both Stuart and Cruz did not have smooth personal "coming out" experiences. Cruz's father kicked him out of his house. He was living in his car only a few months before beginning his role on *My So-Called Life*. Cruz's "coming out" became well-documented, and was incorporated into the series' plotlines.

For the then 20-something-year-old Stuart, it was frightening.

“I was totally wrong about both of them and how they would react,” Stuart said. “My father was ‘Oh, who cares?’ and my mother was the one that had the problem. Then it got worst, and two years later she stopped talking to me.”

Of course, Stuart and his mom wound up getting along so fabulously he frequently jokes about her in his stand-up comedic acts.

“Mom, I’m going to be doing the Rosie O’Donnell cruise,” Stuart jokes. “You should come with me—it’s for gay people and their families. ‘How am I supposed to meet a guy on that farkakte cruise?’ she would reply.”

Stuart publicly “came out” to viewers of the highly rated *Geraldo* in 1993 after 10 years of doing stand-up with “no point of view.” It took a year of performing fat jokes for Stuart to realize that they didn’t work.

“When I first started, I put a bathroom scale around my neck,” Stuart said. “I talked about being a fat kid, which was totally ridiculous because I was never fat doing stand-up.”

Ironically, Stuart used his successful stand-up career as his entry into better acting roles.

Asked if he thought he was typecasted as gay when auditioning for roles, Stuart responded, “I play probably three different kinds of parts: the fussy manager in charge of something, but I always have no power; the funny gay guy; or the emotional doctors, where they are either a shrink or a veterinarian, like in *My Wife and Kids*.”

So what’s Cruz’s take on typecasting? “I don’t even know what that means,” Cruz said. “Do I get called in mainly for gay roles? Sure. But I don’t think I’ve ever played the same role in my career. They’ve all been gay but they’ve all been so completely different. I don’t really think about it very much. I just want to work and do good work. The more opportunities, the better.”

The opportunities and critical acclaim really presented themselves in the form of two back-to-back drag roles for Wilson. In 1997, singing and dancing the role of Angel Dumott Schunard in *Rent* at the Ahmanson in the evenings, and acting as the doomed street hustler Stephen/Stephanie Grant in *Ally McBeal* on the FOX lot during the day, marked the first times Cruz actually performed in drag.

“I’d never been in a pair of heels, but somehow it felt natural,” Cruz said. “That’s what frightened me the most. I’m too good at this right away. Like a fish to water.”

Although Cruz doesn’t usually perform in drag, he agreed to dress up in drag for an Actors’ Fund benefit, and he received whoops and uproarious applause for his rendition of “A Little More Mascara” from *La Cage Aux Folles*. After being confined to a size 0 skirt in *Rent*, Cruz decided to start buffing up his body. He kicked it up a notch when he was cast in *Party Monster* and realized that he would be surrounded by young, beautiful people, of which he would be one. And fortunately for viewers of *Noah’s Arc*, in which Cruz is scantily clad (as he describes his costumes), he’s kicked up his workouts another notch.

As the first “out” gay stand-up to perform in many comedy venues, Stuart works out his comedy chops as a corporate speaker hilariously expounding on the topic of being openly gay in the workplace. His lecture “To Be Out, or Not To Be Out” were derived from the oft-asked questions poised during the Q&As he’s had after his stand-up routines.

Which leads us to Coffee Date. Stuart initially got involved with this comedy after director/writer Stewart Wade and producer Cindy Peters recognized Stuart from his producing and starring duties in Ten Attitudes and offered him his role. Cruz was initially introduced to Coffee Date, by a chance meeting with Stuart at last year's Outfest when Stuart told him he'd be perfect for the role of Kelly.

Both actors had interesting replies to the closing question of our coffee date as to what advice for "coming out" they would give young actors.

"'Coming out' is a personal thing," Cruz said. "But being good at what you do is good business. If you're going to be an 'out' gay actor, just know that it's going to be a little harder—it just is. The only way to minimize how hard it is on you is to be as good as you possibly can. That means studying your craft and working as much as you possibly can and keeping your ego in check and make it about the work."

Stuart gave the following advice: "Come out! Come out where ever you are! When you are 'out,' you are 'out' for me, and I am 'out' for you. We become a big community, and we're like a large family."

For a chance to see Jason Stuart performing in November, log onto his Web site ([jasonstuart.com](http://jasonstuart.com)). You can catch Wilson Cruz on the new episodes of Noah's Arc on Logo ([logoonline.com](http://logoonline.com)).

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