

Out comedian Jason Stuart gets Rrazzed (in San Francisco)

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By Paul E. Pratt, EDGE Providence

“I’ve spent the last couple of years playing it straight, which is something people thought would never happen,” says Jason Stuart.

Since his start in the industry during the early '80s, Stuart has steadily become one of Hollywood’s most in-demand character actors, building a career on quirky and memorable supporting and cameo roles. His resume boasts an impressive array of more than 40 film and television projects including big-screen hits like Kindergarten Cop and celebrated small-screen fare from comedies Will & Grace and Everybody Hates Chris to dramatic work on House, M.D. and The Closer.

Over time, as one of entertainment’s most prolific out performers, Stuart admits he became a favorite of directors casting gay or “sexually ambiguous” characters. In recent times, though, he’s seen a shift in the roles he’s offered.

“Now I’m over 35, so in a way, I’ve ‘aged out’ of playing gay characters,” he says. “Isn’t that crazy?”

According to Stuart, Hollywood largely reserves roles written specifically as gay for “young, hot, totally shaven” performers. He’s been offered such parts far less frequently now that he’s become a “bald, goateed, beefy bear.”

“Wait, I’m not a ‘bear,’” he corrects himself. “I’m somewhere between a ‘cub’ and something else. You have to be bigger to be a ‘bear,’ I was told by the bear community, but I am an honorary bear.”

Stuart pauses for a moment to think.

“It’s all so confusing!” he says finally, cracking up. “I’m not sure what I am, I’m just glad they like me.”

No longer just the gay guy

The actor laughs out loud at himself frequently during the telephone call from Fire Island. There to headline the New York gay resort city's leather week activities, Stuart alternates between surfing the web – “Tony Curtis died today!” he gasps at one point during the call, “He was so hot when he was young!” – and Facebook – “I always feel like a 12-year-old girl when I send a friend request,” he confesses — to candidly discussing how his career is changing with age.

Whereas just five years ago Stuart was the “gay guy” in such indie film festival favorites as *Coffee Date* and *Puff, Puff, Pass*, now he is being offered straight roles even in gay-themed films. For example, he played a creepy heterosexual in the queer retelling of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*.

“The opportunities are getting better,” he confesses, “But the competition is getting stiffer. You wouldn't believe the people I audition against!”

Though his options are increasing dramatically, Stuart is still far from landing a consistent gig on series television (“It could happen,” he enthuses). So like many others in Hollywood, he keeps multiple irons in the fire. When not adding to his already extensive acting credits, he spends a significant amount of time polishing and touring with his comedy routine.

Though Stuart calls stand-up his “day job,” compared to the greater passion he feels for acting, it's proven no less successful. In addition to entertaining on numerous gay cruises, he headlines LGBT pride festivals, events and comedy clubs across the country. He landed a 2005 *Here! Network* stand-up special *Jason Stuart: Making It to the Middle* and, more recently, a spot on LOGO's 2009 *One Night Stand-Up*.

From Nov. 19-21, Stuart comes to San Francisco. With gal-pal and *Last Comic Standing* alum Michelle Balan, he headlines *The Razz Room*,

222 Mason St., San Francisco. Like most of his shows, he anticipates a mixed crowd — both gays and straights.

“That’s really my favorite to play to,” he says. “Straight people are just shocked by everything. Gay people, they love to hear the details. But the mixed crowds are the most fun.”

Per the performer, also Chairman of the Screen Actors Guild’s very first LGBT Committee and host of web talkshow Name-Dropping with Jason Stuart on LOGO Online’s AfterElton.com section, most of his comedy focuses on the challenges of getting older. He discusses his own aging as well as his parents, who have “gone crazy” in their old age.

To truly mine his personal life for comedic gems, Stuart also addresses the most significant obstacle in his life at the moment – dating. “Right now, the biggest thing in my life is to find a great guy – that’s my goal,” confesses the actor. “And with gay marriage at the forefront of everyone’s mind, it’s even more pressing, right?!”

Unfortunately, with his travel and hectic work schedule, Stuart says it’s not easy to meet someone special. Besides, he claims to have terrible luck when it comes to men! He recalls recently dating someone with a heart condition.

“I was afraid if I fucked him, it might kill him,” he recollects. “That was bad enough, but then he stopped returning my calls.”

That was particularly frustrating, recalls Stuart.

“I was really worried,” he remembers. “I kept asking ‘Did he die? Or maybe he just wasn’t that into me?’”