

Coming out boosted comic's career

By Brad Harvey, Correspondent

"I dated a guy who was pierced everywhere. I chipped a tooth." Now, that's a pretty hilarious joke coming from a female comic. But given that the lines belong to the very male and very openly gay comic/actor Jason Stuart, the context becomes either funnier or more offensive, depending on your sexual prejudices and/or preferences. Being gay in a straight society is a dichotomy that Mr. Stuart has wrestled with for much of his professional and personal life. Or, as he humorously states in his act when accused of proselytizing for an alternative lifestyle, "What's the selling point? We have no rights and everyone hates us. Please, come along! Join us!"

Ironically, Mr. Stuart's career didn't take off until he publically acknowledged his homosexuality after 10 years of stand-up comedy. Tired of pretending to be heterosexual for the sake of his act, he outted himself at a comedy club and then on national television via "Geraldo" in 1993. Despite warnings that he was committing professional suicide, Mr. Stuart's career took off.

Enjoying a high profile with appearances on television shows such as "The Drew Carey Show," "Charmed," "Murder She Wrote," as well as roles in films like "National Lampoon's Vegas Vacation" and "Kindergarten Cop," Mr. Stuart would seem to be a poster boy for gay rights in the entertainment industry.

"I have no choice in that," he said in a recent interview. "That has nothing to do with me. That has to do with what you guys (the media) do. Everybody has a different perception. I want to be a really good comedian. I want to make people laugh. I want to hopefully enlighten the gay community and help tolerance in the straight community. And be the best person I can be.

"If all that comes to pass, that's fabulous," laughed Mr. Stuart adding, "and I don't use the 'F' word lightly!"

Asked which medium he prefers working in, television or films, Mr. Stuart said he would "love to do a TV series, though TV kind of white-

washes everything. In films, they're a little more open and tend to have more of an edge."

One of Mr. Stuart's favorite film roles was his dramatic debut in "Southern Man," soon to be out on video. In it, Mr. Stuart plays a teacher who mentors a student and is murdered when the student's abusive father mistakenly assumes the two are having an affair. Mr. Stuart also starred in the David Spade movie "Lost and Found." The two actors have been friends since Mr. Spade's own stand-up days.

"I loved working on that," enthused Mr. Stuart. "David didn't know I was doing the movie. When we rehearsed, he sort of changed his whole point of view for me. We tried it so many different ways, it was fun."

Mr. Stuart's most recent film is shooting in September. It's called "The Fluffer" and he described it as "kind of like a gay version of 'Boogie Nights.'" It's about the gay porno industry. I play this once-famous photographer who has been in the business a long time and is cynical about the way things have ended up and who hates having to deal with the same things over and over again."

Mr. Stuart currently is developing a script with Emmy Award-winning producer/director Michael O. Gallant called "Going Straight" that concerns sexual conversion. He hopes to collaborate with a well-known Hollywood writer on the project.

"I don't think I'm the best person to write a screenplay," Mr. Stuart said about his scripting capabilities. "But I am the best person to act in it and help with ideas. I write good jokes and good dialogue, but I also believe you should get the best person for the job.

"I'm always looking for the role in a film that you become identified with," he added. "Getting people to believe in you is really hard. Everybody's afraid to take a risk. I find I know less and less every day. "Show business is a strange business," Mr. Stuart said. "It's like high school with money."