

BUSY COMIC IS OUT AND ABOUT By Rita Rose
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Comedian Jason Stuart has a message for straight people about gay marriage: "Come on ... it's the year 2004. If you let us marry each other, we will stop marrying you!"

Stuart, an openly gay standup comic and actor, will have plenty to say about gay marriage □ and lots of other topics □ when he returns to Indianapolis with his Big Fat Gay Jewish Comedy Tour Wednesday through Saturday at Crackers Downtown.

It's his second gig at the club, where he sold out six of seven shows last year. In 2002, Stuart was the opening act for comedian Kate Clinton at the Indiana Roof, and he appeared at the Indianapolis Gay and Lesbian Film Festival that year for his independent film, "10 Attitudes," which he acted in and produced.

While gay marriage is a hot topic, Stuart has plenty of other material to make audiences laugh. And you don't have to be gay to appreciate it, he said.

"I talk about my family, growing up, politics, pop culture, dating, traveling, getting older and gays in the military," Stuart said by phone from his Los Angeles home. "I also do impressions of 'Star Search' and 'American Idol.' It's not really a dirty show, honestly. I flirt, but it's not dirty."

Stuart writes his own material, which is "always changing" with life's experiences. "Almost everything I talk about is what has happened to me. When I was a kid, we always played doctor, but the straight kids always made me be the receptionist."

Generally Supportive

Jason Stuart

With: Dave Beck and John Garrett.

Where: Crackers Comedy Club, 247 S. Meridian St.

When: 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday; 8 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Tickets: \$8-\$18.

Info: (317) 631-3536.

Most of his family is supportive of his career and have attended his comedy shows, he said. His mom “always becomes part of the act” and he counts his sister-in-law as “my best audience, although I don’t know why she finds me so hysterical. My father doesn’t think I’m funny, but he comes anyway. ‘Why do you have to talk about the family?’ he says.”

His sister, however, won’t speak to him because of his sexual orientation. “She’s an Orthodox Jew, and she and her husband won’t let me see their kids,” he said. “They feel I will influence them (to be gay),” he said. “Their kids live secluded and sheltered lives with no opportunity to express themselves, so yes, I’d like to influence them. But not in the way they think.”

A standup comic since 1983, Stuart has experienced an upsurge in his career since he came out on Geraldo Rivera’s talk show in 1993. He’s had acting roles in several independent films and has a recurring role as Dr. Thomas, the, gay shrink on the ABC sitcom “My Wife & Kids,” with Damon Wayans. He also has appeared on “Will & Grace,” “Strong Medicine,” “The Drew Carey Show” and “Murder, She Wrote.” In feature films, he was in “Kindergarten Cop” with his now-governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and recently filmed “Ghosts Never Sleep” with Faye Dunaway.

He makes regular appearances at The Laugh Factory in Los Angeles and recently hosted Show West in Las Vegas. He also released his first CD, □Gay Comedy without a Dress□ available online

at jasonstuart.com

Life-changing Experience

Coming out, he said, changed his whole life. And doing it on a national TV was a risk. □My family and friends knew I was gonna do it,□ he said of the □Geraldo□ appearance. □It was scary, because you never know what□s gonna happen or how people will react. In some ways, it

(being out) is easier, in some ways harder, because it's another way for people to limit you as an actor.

“People think every gay role is the same, but they're different, really. I feel blessed in that way. I'm lucky to play both straight and gay roles and don't feel at all limited as an actor.”

Stuart also doesn't want being gay to define him as a human being. “It doesn't bother me, but it's not all of who I am. I'm also an activist, a son, a friend, a character actor – I'm a multidimensional person.”
Lectures to businesses

He also isn't limited to doing standup comedy and films. In his spare time, he does lectures on college campuses and for Fortune 500 companies, offering insights about what it's like to be openly gay in the workplace. He mixes a bit of comedy with his lectures, which are sponsored by Out Media. “I've gotten a lot of good feedback,” he said.

Although he doesn't have a significant other at the moment, the comedian thinks marriage should be for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.

“It's all about division of church and state,” he said. “I believe any church is a private organization and religious beliefs should be respected, and you have the right in church. In law, gays should have the same rights as everyone else in the country and, as American, should be treated equally.”

About Jason Stuart

□ Age: 38.

□ Born: In the Bronx, reared in Los Angeles.

□ Family: “I come from a very crazy and lovable Jewish family.”

□ Notable award: Best picture award at the Barcelona Gay & Lesbian Film Festival for “10 Attitudes,” which he starred in and produced.

□ Recent independent films: “What Adam Knows,” with Paul Willson and Tori Davis; “Ghosts Never Sleep,” with Faye Dunaway; and “A Day Without A Mexican with

Yareli Arizmemdi.

□ Theater credits: “Mister Roberts,” “Night of January 16th,” “The Caucasian Chalk Circle,” “The Sand Castle,” “Coriolanus,” “Panic in Griffith Park.”

□ CD: “Gay Comedy Without A Dress.”

□ Web site: jasonstuart.com.

□ On being openly gay: “I’m as out as you can be! I’m so gay and so out, I could redecorate a room just by looking at it!”