

Coffee talk and more

Comedian Jason Stuart dishes on the state of gay TV, Faye Dunaway and sitcom therapy for straight people
By ERIC JAMES

Jason Stuart is, to put it mildly, a busy man. In the past month, he has been to Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, Ohio, New York State and Kansas City. Stuart is completing the last leg of his comedy tour that will ultimately take him back to Hollywood.

The gay comedian has also been offered ten different movie roles since his improvisational film *10 Attitudes* was released a couple of years ago. He can currently be seen in the film *Coffee Date*, playing flamboyant office manager Clayton. (It is currently playing at the Angelika Film Center in downtown Houston.)

The big-screen comedy revolves around Todd (Jonathan Bray), a straight man who works with Clayton.

Everyone assumes Todd is gay after his brother sets him up on a blind date with another man (Wilson Cruz).

Much of the humor in *Coffee Date* comes in moments when Clayton catches Todd and his blind date, Kelly, in situations that make it appear as if they are in a relationship. It's one misunderstanding after another as Todd must come to terms with his true sexual identity. Does he love Kelly if he's not gay? Is he gay if he loves Kelly?

The theme of *Coffee Date* is summed up by Stuart's character in a very sweet moment near the end of the film. Clayton speaks of several different kinds of love, not all of them revolving around sex. It is a crucial moment in the film—and one that was created by writer/director Stewart Wade specifically for Stuart.

With the knowledge that Stuart enjoys improvisation, one must ask: How much of his part was performed as written, and how much done off the cuff?

"I love improvising," Stuart says. "I took (Wade) all of my changes, and he liked all but one."

That "one" is a joke during which Clayton tries to prove Todd is gay by asking, "Do you swear on Judy Garland's grave?" Stuart wanted to say, "Do you swear on Liza Minnelli's third gay husband?"

Ultimately, the filmmakers didn't want to offend anyone who was still alive, and the Garland joke made the final cut.

Coffee Date also gave Stuart the chance to work with pop star/Broadway actress Deborah (Debbie) Gibson, whom he calls "terrific." Gibson not only acts in the film, but she performs an original tune over the end credits, which touches on several different kinds of love.

Gibson is only one of several actors Stuart has had a chance to work with in recent years, and he considers himself extremely fortunate for the experiences. Earlier this year, Stuart starred alongside Faye Dunaway in *Ghosts Never Sleep*.

And what was it like to work with this screen legend?

"She kept pointing to the Oscar in her purse and saying, 'I won this,'" Stuart deadpans. He is joking, of course—but only partly.

"(Faye) carried me through the scene. It felt like I was Lois Lane, and she was Superman."

Speaking of the Man of Steel, Stuart worked with gay director Bryan Singer on an episode of the FOX TV hit *House*. Singer once crashed Stuart's birthday party but is really, "very sweet."

It is from his varied television appearances that most may recognize Stuart. And he's done it all: a talking head on VH1's *Love Lounge* and *The Coolest Years*; having fun on *Match Game*. Stuart's talent for sharp wit and humor has served him well. He even had a recurring role on the Damon Wayans sitcom *My Wife and Kids* as a gay therapist.

"I helped straight people," Stuart says. "God knows they need it."

Stuart says the part was always intended to be gay and that he received 10,000 pieces of fan mail after his initial guest spot—which turned it into a recurring role.

"I didn't play him bitchy or queeny. I played him as the nicest guy who just wanted to help people," he says.

As for his thoughts on the often-stereotypical portrayal of gay men on television, Stuart sees a bigger problem: There are simply not enough gay characters on TV.

Stuart is indeed doing his part to change that. His next television project is the comedy special *Making it to the Middle*, which he is currently shopping around to Comedy Central, Logo and Showtime. It's about being on the road and performing his standup act.

It is standup comedy, in fact, that currently keeps Stuart so busy. He was recently in Kansas City performing his stand-up act *Looking for Mr. Right*. When asked if he's found him Stuart says plainly, "No."

"Please explain to me how to meet Mr. Right because I can't find him," he adds. "I don't know where to look or what he looks like."

His schedule might also be a factor. It included seven performances at the Kansas City Improv in five days. How does he survive such a busy schedule?

"I lay down a lot," he says.