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By Jade Moon

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*“My mother calls me on the phone. I say, Ma, don’t get mad ... I just met this really neat guy. She goes, ‘Is he gay?’” (Hoots of laughter from audience)*

*I say, “No, Ma, he’s a leprechaun. Of course he’s gay!” -Jason Stuart*

While the joke loses a bit of its bite in transition from manic stage performance to printed page, it reveals what you need to know about Jason Stuart he’s a funny guy who also happens to be Jewish and gay. The fact that Stuart is out and proud serves him well because, like all good comic artists, he draws his best material from his life and wields truth like a sword. He can be potty-mouthed and raunchy. He’s also vulnerable and utterly sincere. He walks a thin edge between emotional vulnerability and broad sexual stereotype.

“The deal is, I want to get married. I really want to get married. I want the whole thing. I want the wedding, I want the walk down the aisle, I want Barbra Streisand to sing ‘I finally found someone ...’”

Stuart wasn’t always so open. His personal awakening, he says, was gradual, sometimes tortured and inevitable.

“I lied for a long time. I came out to my therapist at the suicide prevention center when I was 21. I came out to my first boyfriend at 20.

I came out to my parents at 24. I came out on television as an actor and comedian at 34.”

Being an openly gay man may be his hook, but being Jewish and having a crazy family are equally important to his comedic persona.

“See, I’m gay and Jewish. So I’m pissed.”

It’s what makes him relatable and likeable to gays and straights alike.

“Thank God,” he says, “that’s my goal. They gotta like you otherwise they won’t have you back.”

Stuart came to show business early in life. He started acting when he was 8, and has played straight and gay roles in more than 40 hit shows, including *The Closer*, *Will and Grace* and *House*. But it’s his stand-up that’s making him a celebrity. He’s performed at all the top comedy clubs and comedy festivals, hundreds of gay pride events, colleges and universities, and on Broadway.

Stuart’s brand of comedy is the beneficiary of changing attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Back when he was struggling with his identity, he had no one to talk to and really no clue about how to live his life as an out gay man. But now, “There’s gay marriage starting everywhere. There’s gays in the military now. There are gay and lesbian centers now all over the country, there’s PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) ...”

And Stuart believes a lot of the change in attitude has got to come from the gay community itself. Gay men, he says, have not traditionally supported gay entertainers. “Cher, Madonna, Streisand, Diana Ross, all the way to Lady Gaga ... we have given these women careers. I think now it’s time to start supporting each other. Gay men need to support gay men the way they support Kathy Griffin and Margaret Cho.”

There are just a few out gay role models, he says. Neil Patrick Harris, for one.

And Adam Lambert, a pop star who has managed to break through prejudice and achieve huge success.

“Adam Lambert I just absolutely adore. He is the most exciting thing to come out of *American Idol* ever. And not just because he’s gay. Because he’s not just a singer, he’s a fantastic showman.”

People such as Lambert, Harris and Stuart are paving the way for the young, something Stuart takes very seriously. He has used his comedy skills to raise tens of thousands of dollars to benefit gay youths. He’s

also the national chairman for the Screen Actors Guild LGBT Committee, which is conducting the first-ever study on openly gay actors.

“This is exciting stuff and I am very humbled to be a part of it,” he says.

“What I try to do one day at a time is to be the best person I can be ... who happens to be a gay man ... who happens to be a comedian ... who happens to be an actor ... who happens to be an advocate for gay people.”

Stuart is hoping the Hawaii community gays, lesbians and straights will come out to support him when he brings his comedy here to Hawaii this month. It'll be his third trip to Hawaii and his first time headlining his own show at Queen Kapiolani Hotel Saturday, Aug. 20.