

May 18, 2010

By Nick Lucchesi, River Front Times

The world of stand-up comedy in 2010, is by many accounts, more welcoming to out-of-the-closet gay comics than it was when Jason Stuart came to St. Louis in the '90s. But even in those pioneering days of out comics, Stuart praises this city for its openness to him. (He recalls having to add additional shows to his sold-out appearances at the Funnybone in Westport Plaza.)

Stuart returns to St. Louis this weekend to the Gaslight Theatre (358 North Boyle Avenue) in the Central West End. The comic-turned character actor (He's had roles on *The Closer*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *House*, *Will and Grace*, *George Lopez* and *Charmed*.) He's doing two shows this weekend.

While he won't even come close to telling his age ("You're going to ask a gay guy his age? That's so not going to happen"), Stuart did talk openly about what he's been up to the decade-plus or so since he's been on a stage in St. Louis, and on calling "bullshit" on the unwritten rule that gay actors can't play straight characters on-screen.

The press release for your appearances in St. Louis begin immediately with your successes at Westport Plaza in the early 90s. What about it? It was my whole Coming Out Tour. I came out in '93 on the Geraldo Show. All through the '90s, I started doing Funnybone chain of comedy clubs across the country and St. Louis was one of the first places.

What was unique about doing it in St. Louis — it sold-out, and had extra shows added. It was just amazing. You know you're from that town and for us in LA, or where I was born in New York, there's a weird mentality that the Midwest is a strange place. But it's not. The only difference is you guys smoke.

You've done a lot of television work as a character actor. You sometimes play a straight character. Is it tougher for gay actors to get straight roles, when in contrast, straight actors often get gay leading roles, like Sean Penn and James Franco in *Milk*?

That *Newsweek* article ("Straight Jacket") claims that out actors cannot play straight parts. So I wrote a rebuttal to it. Because in LA, I'm the chairman of the Screen Actor's Guild LGBT committee. I'm the

chair for two reasons: To be supportive of my fellow actors, and 2.  
[that claim is] bullshit.

I can play a completely different character. You know how I did that?  
I'm an actor!

Where do you see this issue down the line?

I think ten years from now, I think we're going to go, 'oh god, can you  
believe we did stuff like that?'"

As a character actor, you often play the gay guy, or the Jewish guy, or  
the gay Jewish guy, do you ever tire of playing familiar roles, or do you  
see it as a way to further hone your skills?

It's never tiring to have a job. You know?