

For Jason Stuart, being openly gay is just another joke

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Call Jason Stuart any one of these three things:

- 1) an openly gay comedian
- 2) a gay comedian
- 3) a plain old comedian

He doesn't care - as long as you come to one (or all) of his shows at the Improv this weekend (but he might give preference to well-dressed gay single men who sit in the front row). You can even be a part of history: He's reportedly the first openly gay comedian to headline the Improv, something he's so excited about he has to use two adverbs to describe the feeling.

"Isn't that just absolutely amazingly strange?" he said.

If you really want to nitpick, Stuart says he's an "openly gay comedian" rather than a "gay comedian," because the term "gay comedian" implies the person prefers a gay joke to any other kind of joke. But Stuart jokes about everything.

"Straight people get to talk about whatever they want to talk about all the time, so I want to do the same thing," he said.

Let's go back to the whole age thing for a minute. How old is he? "It's too devastatingly real," he said. "You don't ask a gay man his age."

Turns out, he's been lying to the press - and maybe even to himself - for so many years he claims he's forgotten the real number. Not that reporters haven't tried to pin it down, but they haven't had too much success. Either they get the number a little too high (which he says is

totally devastating), or too low (which he loves, because that way he wins the age-guessing game).

In his routine, Stuart jokes about getting older, along with politics, pop culture, his family and his pile of traffic tickets. When he came out about 12 years ago, his routine was totally different, and he slowly changed it by testing new jokes over a two-year period. Now, he doesn't monitor how many of his jokes are gay-themed.

"I don't really think about it at all," he said. "I just talk about what interests me. It's not like, 'Oh, this is gay, and this is not gay.'"

This tour is called the "Looking for Mr. Right Comedy Tour" - even though Stuart just started dating a guy he met in Los Angeles, where he lives. But Stuart said prospective boyfriends shouldn't be discouraged: He has to be married before he changes the tour's name. And comedy tours have been good for meeting people. "I've met a lot of guys over the years," he gushes.

Not all in comedy, either. Stuart also guests on TV sitcoms such as *Fat Actress* and *My Wife and Kids* and works in film. He just landed a supporting role in an independent film called *Going Postal*, where he plays a goofy post office worker. When it comes to roles, he doesn't pick favorites. Straight, gay, ambiguous - everything's game.

"What matters to me is that the roles are good and the people you work with are talented," he said. "The quality of the work is what matters to me. And there isn't one kind of gay part. We're not all exactly alike. I know that's hard to believe."

Ideally, Stuart wants to work in films and do the occasional comedy show. The road is long and lonely, and he'd like to be able to sleep in his own bed after the show. He loves to flirt and chat with his audience at his shows, which helps spice up his routine and break up the monotony of the road. He says that's another one of the reasons he puts "openly" in front of "gay" - so people will know just who they're dealing with.

“Sometimes there are people who don’t like gay people, and I don’t want them to come,” he said. “There are people that love things that are different, and those are the people that I want to come.” Jason Stuart is at the Improv, 6 Market Place in Power Plant Live, tonight through Sunday. Tickets are \$15, and show times vary. Call 410-727-8500 or visit www.baltimoreimprov.com.