

Balan & Stuart: Out, Funny, Jewish, Oy!

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By Mike Ward, San Francisco Bay Times

Prior to their upcoming SF gig (Nov. 19-21), I had a moment to chat with out gay stand-up comics Michele Balan & Jason Stuart.

(Bay Times) Jason & Michele, Two Jews Walk into the RRazz Room... and Tell Jokes! It reminds me of a reduced version of the song "Four Jews Sitting in a Room Bitching." Who needs Four when there are Two fab comics like you?

(Jason Stuart) You are so sweet. I hope you're hot and single, have a job and a car and don't live in it! We decided to be out and proud about being Jewish!

(Michele Balan) It can also be called "Two Jews in a Room Bitching... the other two killed themselves!" Honestly, how can anyone handle more than TWO Jews in a room talking!

There's a decided edge in comedy when it comes to cultural background. What is it that Jews have that gives the comic edge?

(Stuart) We are masters at complaining. I know I got my edge from my family... with a father who was in the holocaust who calls me every day to tell what my best friend Obama has done to him today! A mother from Brooklyn who at 73 still wears cha-cha heels, plastic earrings and has a snap-on ponytail. A brother who has been mad since Barbra Streisand lost the Oscar to Glenda Jackson in 1973. And a sister who is an Orthodox Jew who looks like she walked off the set of Yentl. This gives me a wealth of material to draw from... oh yeah, I'm gay too!

(Balan) Jews were pioneers in comedy. They had to put their angst and unhappiness somewhere. Other ethnic groups with these feelings might go and shoot a group of people on a train. The Jews were always too afraid to ever do anything like that, and probably couldn't get a gun for wholesale, so we told jokes! I remember telling my grandmother I was a lesbian. She said, "No, you're not, you're Romanian! On your father's side!"

Michele, having been a former model on the runway... okay, airport runway... what trends in fashion do you have a red-alert out for?

(Balan) Unfortunately, today they mostly make low-waisted jeans, so I sit down and my tuchas (you may need to explain this word to non-Jews) sticks out, and NO one wants to see my naked tuchas!

[Note: "Tush" is derived from the Yiddish "tuchas."]

Both of you have been involved with bullying issues, letting gay teens know that the last laugh is had by those who make it through bullying...

(Stuart) For me, being bullied as a kid never really goes away. I was that kid. ...[I]n the first week of 7th grade, a kid scraped the word "fag" on my locker. Even though I could only see that word when I fumbled with the combination, the sadness and loneliness that the word made me feel lingered in the back of my mind every day of those horrific three years, a feeling that continued until I finally came out publicly on television in 1993. This one act, and other daily forms of abuse by my classmates, changed my life and my ability to learn and participate in friendships and relationships.

(Balan) When I get back home to NY, I am doing a big benefit show for the A.N.G.E.L Initiative for the prevention of suicide. I think it is awful the bullying that goes on in school now, and even when I was in school (and that was 100 years ago!). I think there needs to be a law that any kid that bullies another kid is thrown out of school and sent to a reform school. No child — gay, straight or of a religious belief or for any reason — should have to deal with that torment. It is out of control, and this country better set some real laws!

Michele Balan and Jason Stuart in Two Jews Walk into The RRazz Room and Tell Jokes! At The RRazz Room, 222 Mason Street, San Francisco. Info at [therrazzroom.com](http://therrazzroom.com), [michelebalan.com](http://michelebalan.com) and [jasonstuart.com](http://jasonstuart.com).