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By Doug Kaufman
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Actor-comedian Jason Stuart, who is gay, owes a tremendous debt to the public coming out party of another standup comic.

“Ellen DeGeneres changed my life,” Stuart said by phone from his Los Angeles home. “Things started to really change for me in 1997, when she came out. I started to work like crazy, as an actor, in small parts on television.”

His “work like crazy” appearances included TV shows “Providence,” “The Huntress,” “Norm,” “The Drew Carey Show,” “Charmed,” “Will and Grace” and “Three Sisters,” plus roles in “Lost and Found” with David Spade, “Vegas Vacation” with Chevy Chase and several independent films.

“It made it OK for me to come into the room,” he said. “I spent my 20s walking around, going into (audition) rooms, and having people dismiss me.... I never even got rejected. I was dismissed.

“What that does to you as a human being is awful to be dismissed. If I’d wanted to be a hairdresser or an interior decorator, I wouldn’t have had this problem.”

Stuart, who injects life experiences into his standup, promises new, outrageous material when he takes the stage Wednesday through Sunday at the Funny Bone Comedy Club in West Port Plaza.

“You’ll laugh, you’ll cry—it’ll be better than ‘Cats,’” he said. Stuart has been a comic for 19 years. He admits to being “thirty something,” but declines to be specific.

“I don’t even know how old I am, I’ve been lying about my age for so long,” he said.

Stuart, whose CD “Gay Comedy Without a Dress” is available at www.jasonstuart.com, offers a wide-ranging standup performance.

“I basically talk about any thing,” he said. “My newest thing that I talk about is my fear of amusement parks. You know now that I’m getting older, I don’t want to go on a ride where I almost die.”

Stuart got off the career roller coaster long ago and now seemingly has nothing to fear. He’s particularly pleased about his recurring role on the ABC show “My Wife and Kids,” which stars Damon Wayans. It can be seen locally at 7 p.m. Mondays on Channel 30.

Stuart plays an openly gay psychiatrist, Steven Michael Thomas who counsels a straight couple played by Wayans and actress Tisha Campbell-Martin.

“They’re so terrific together,” he said. “They have such a wonderful chemistry. And he’s so hot – don’t tell him I said that.”

Stuart feels his role is breaking new ground. “I’m an openly gay man playing an openly gay man, which is almost historic on television,” he said, laughing. “There don’t seem to be that many gay people playing gay people.”

Stuart played the psychiatrist in an episode that aired in January. The producers liked him and so did fans, who Stuart said sent thousands of positive letters. So he will appear in three of the four shows to air in May.

“The thing about my character is he’s very different than any character I’ve ever played on TV,” Stuart said. “He’s very, umm, nice, and I usually play somebody who’s a manager or in charge of some department or some store and no one will listen to me. And I’m always upset. So this is really great.”

Stuart was given more creative flexibility, even improvising lines with Wayans. “Everybody was so supportive,” he said. “I have to tell you at one point during the show I went into my dressing room and I just started to cry, I was so happy. I’m not used to having people be so interested in what I’m doing and what I’m saying. When you’re gay in this business, it’s a different thing. You’re usually there on the side.”

Stuart has a few words on co stars ranging from Arnold to Clooney

Comedian-actor Jason Stuart has worked with some of Hollywood’s biggest stars. Here are his takes on a few of them:

□ Arnold Schwarzenegger “Kindergarten Cop” □ Stuart played a hairdresser. “What can I say? He’s not an actor’s actor. He shows up. I would do another movie with him in a minute. He was very nice to me.... That was my first big studio picture.”

□ Chevy Chase, “Vegas Vacation” □ My scene was with him and Randy Quaid. I played a rude kitchen worker. And after rehearsal, . . . he (Chase) said, “Oh so you’re gonna be funny in this?” And then he walked away. The director comes over to me and says, “Jason, that’s just his sense of humor.” I said, “Look, I’m gay and a nightclub comic and I went to public school. There is nothing you can say to me that will offend me.” By the end of the day, we were great pals and he was speaking with an English accent.”

□ Martin Short, “Cross My Heart” □ I played a funny waiter, and I can remember Martin not wanting me to be that funny.”

□ George Clooney, “Sunset Beat” (TV) □ “I was so in love with him—oh, my God.” Clooney liked to improvise. “I would learn my lines letter perfect, and then he would say, “Oh, let’s just do whatever we want.” ” Stuart had a recurring role as Marty, the nightclub owner. He enjoyed working with Clooney. “He was the sweetest, nicest man. I just wish I would’ve sucked up to him. I didn’t think he would go any place. Oh, he was a mess.”