

If you've ever seen Will & Grace, Roseanne, Ellen or watched LOGO, there's a good chance you've seen Jason Stuart. Featured as a character actor on those shows and more, Jason has risen to stardom amongst TV's LGBT and straight viewers around the world.

Stuart has been acting since the 1980's, but like many now-out entertainers, didn't officially come out of the closet until the early-90's. Now being cast in numerous gay roles and as the host of a successful talk show on LOGO, Name Dropping with Jason Stuart, he has become a huge advocate for LGBT equality.

Earlier this year, on May 22nd, he graced St. Louis with his presence by speaking at the Harvey Milk Day march to city hall. Now he's making a second visit to showcase his comedy tour. Vital VOICE got a chance to ask a few questions, so, without further adieus, here's what he had to say:

Colin Lovett: Have there been any characters that you've played that you felt really capture you as a person?

Jason Stuart: No... most of the time it's just pieces of me. I am sort of "Sybil" when I work. I use some of my own parts of life and other times I see stuff folks do and steal their behavior.

CL: Were there any roles that changed you as a person?

JS: I did a play this year and did the lead role. I am a "supporting guy" so this was great for me to use all the experience I have had acting in over 100 films, TV shows and plays.

CL: Among other stereotypically gay roles, in 1985 you played the "Gay Dude" in The Lost Empire, but didn't come out until 93'. How does playing a gay role before you're out impact you both as an actor, and as a person?

JS: That was my first film. I was so thrilled to be in a real movie! It starred Robert Terrier from the original "Longest Yard" with Burt Reynolds (who I had a crush on). It was a terrible experience. The director told me to wear a flashy shirt. He did not like my choice and asked me to add a scarf. I talked him out of the scarf and I had only bought the one shirt. He told me to wear the make-up girl's shirt, which was a size too small. I was so embarrassed. I never said a word. But times have changed and I have been able to play wonderful gay roles that folks have seemed to love in films like Coffee Date and 10

Attitudes. And later this year I will play gay roles in The Stand In and Finding Mr. Wright... hopefully.

CL: I met you in St. Louis 6 months ago when we both did the KC Radio interview for Harvey Milk Day. Between events like that and your advocacy for youth and LGBT equality, how would you say that your success impacts your activism?

JS: It was such an honor to have been asked to speak on Harvey Milk Day. The documentary and the feature film Milk came out really changed my life. I cried when I was cast in the film and when I was cut out of it I cried again.

CL: You mentioned in a Huffington Post blog that at one point you turned to help because you were considering suicide as a result of being bullied in your youth – and that even then, you could not fully disclose your sexuality to the counselor. Would you mind commenting on that experience and how it has changed you and your direction?

JS: It was so personal – but when all of [the suicides] came into the news I felt it was right to write something that I hoped would help others. I have lectured at colleges and big companies for years and it has meant a lot to me for folks to share their stories with me and mine with them. As the “Act Up” years ago said so perfectly – “Silence Equals Death”.

CL: Was there something specific that marked things getting better – when the proverbial lights turned on?

JS: When I came out in 1993 on the Geraldo Show, fans would give me standing ovations before I said my first joke on stage. I was a very special time, I so enjoyed so doing stand up comedy as a gay man for the first time. I just wish I felt it more. I was still a bit scared of people..but things did and have gotten better.

CL: Considering that the midterm election yesterday significantly changed the majority of power held by liberal politicians, what do you feel we need to do as a community, and more importantly, what can we do as individuals?

JS: Stick together even more. Support each other more. The lesbians seem to support each other in such a big way. Don't get me wrong – I love all our Divas too. But I think it is time for gay men to step from

behind the skirts of women and stand up for each other in the same way the women in the community have.

CL: What would you tell young aspiring actors?

JS: Lean you craft. Experience the work and make sure you really love it. You have to give up so much. When I guest-starred on *The Closer* last year I had such a great time. I had so much fun and Kyra Sedgwick was so wonderful to work with. I still love the work, and that's what it's all about at the end of the day.

CL: What message do you have for LGBT youth and the rest of our community who still has it tough?

JS: Come out, come out where ever you are! Being in the closet does not really work for anyone in my experience. You are standing on shoes in back of the clothes and hat boxes and stuff is in your way. Some stranger comes in every once in a while, opens a door and flashes a light in your face, then shuts it quickly and you are in the dark again. The room is usually small and cramped. This not a good place to plan your life choices.

CL: You now have a successful show on LOGO, *Name Dropping* with Jason Stuart, where you have already interviewed famous LGBT actors Leslie Jordan, Peter Paige and Jon Polito. If you could interview one politician, one straight person, and one LGBT person – who would those people be?

JS: Bill Clinton, Dustin Hoffman and Rosie O'Donnell.

CL: What will we see next from Jason Stuart?

JS: Some more stand up in gay events and colleges. Several Indie films are coming out next year – you can check my website for dates and more info. And my hope is to land a good role in a studio film that changes my life creatively and is a big fat success!

CL: Ok... random question... Partnered? Married? Up for grabs?

JS: I'm up for grabs! I would really like to be married in the next few years. My fake relationship with Ricky Martin has to stop!