

May 18th, 2010

By Colin Murphy, The Vital Voice

At long last the wait is over as openly gay actor and comedian, Jason Stuart returns to The Lou for two-shows-only, May 21-22 at The Gaslight Theatre (358 N. Boyle).

Many will remember Stuart's wildly popular 1990s Coming Out Comedy Tour where he became the first openly gay comic to headline mainstream comedy clubs both here and around the county. In fact the funny man sold out so many St. Louis shows that the West Port Plaza club had to add additional dates.

"You guys in St. Louis gave me so much love and so much confidence in being able to be who I was," said Stuart. "You guys put me out into the country in a really good way and I got a lot of work because of it with the Funny Bone comedy chain."

Stuart is excited to return to St. Louis with his new tour, Jason Stuart: Making It To The Middle and promises an OUTrageously fun evening.

A prolific actor with over 100 film and television credits; the chair of the Screen Actors Guild National LGBT Actors Committee has appeared in myriad roles, including House, Will & Grace, George Lopez, and Charmed, to name a few.

Vital VOICE recently caught up with Stuart via telephone where he talked about his coming out, his comedy, and the controversial Newsweek story attacking openly gay actors:

Colin Murphy: Many people will remember you from your Coming Out Tour at West Port's Funny Bone in the 1990s. When you were first starting that tour as an openly gay comic, were you concerned how you would be received in the Midwest?

Jason Stuart: It wasn't the Midwest that I was worried about. I think what I was worried about is how it [coming out] would impact on my career—whether I would have lost all of my entire inner dreams and

what I wanted to do. I mean people have this stereotype of the Midwest; but you have to realize, I toured in the Midwest ten years before that as a closeted act. So this idea of separating audiences because of where they live was not my experience.

CM: What compelled you to come out—what was the catalyst?

JS: It was exhausting. It's hard to live in the closet—there's hat boxes and shit in the way—you're standing on boxes of shoes and you're behind the leather jacket. Then somebody opens up the closet and light goes on for a second and then immediately goes right back off and you don't really get to see things clearly. I mean I've lived totally in the closet—I've lived sort of half-and-half and then I've lived totally out—and I would never go back.

All I really ever wanted to do was be an actor; and being a comedian was sort of a stepping stone to that, but I had gotten very successful doing it and not really realizing that I had a talent for that. So my hope was that being who I was would be accepting to people. It's so interesting that we're talking today about this because I don't know if you read the Newsweek article...

CM: Yes—let's talk about that. I don't know what was more frustrating—the fact that the writer said gay men can't play believable straight roles or that it was a gay man who wrote it?

JS: Well both—did you read the piece in Daily Variety? When I read this [Newsweek] article by this gay man, who's a journalist, basically disparaging Sean Hayes' performance because he knew that he was gay—if John Ritter had played that role or Jerry Lewis in the 1960s had played that role; both of them very feminine in their work as actors, both of them heterosexual men—I don't think that he would have said that. Just because someone is effete in some sort of way is not always equated with homosexuality. Secondly—he even says in his article that the audience was really digging his performance. It's a fun, saucy musical and he was also nominated for a Tony award for the role—let's get that into the equation—which he didn't even say in the article... And I was so frustrated because so much has gone on in the last ten years, and I can only speak from my own experience. Last year I guest starred on *The Closer* and I played a very big role as a heterosexual; I've had a role in a show called *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and

played a heterosexual; I played a cop in a movie for the first time in a film called *The Truth About Layla* with Catherine Hicks from *7th Heaven*. I've been able to have opportunities in addition to gay roles and other more effete roles—and I never want to stop playing gay parts. But if I waited around for just the gay roles I wouldn't be able to make a living.

So many of the things he said so mortified me—like the idea that Neil Patrick Harris and Portia de Rossi on their sitcom were caricatures because they were working in comedy. So almost disparaging the idea that comedy is not as real as drama and not to be viewed in the same way. There's so many he things that he attacked on so many levels and what he is basically saying is that it's OK for heterosexual, white, Christian men to play anything and nobody cares—but if a gay person plays something or someone who is of a different origin in their life, then their work isn't as valid ... What he is saying is just not true and what he's also doing by putting that out there—he's affecting my living as an actor by telling people I can't do stuff. I invite anyone to go to my website; look at the work that I've done, and tell me I can't play different types of characters...

This idea—it's blatant homophobia, I believe, and when people say it's just the media because we know so much about everybody—we've always known things about people. I'm sort of glad that he did it because he did it so badly. His arguments were so bad and his self loathing was so apparent and I've never talked to anybody who agrees with him.

CM: Back to *Making it to the Middle*—what can people expect from your show?

JS: My favorite thing that happened the other night: I was doing a show in Los Angeles for the Lifeworks mentoring program, which is a place to mentor gay youth. And I'm doing the show and I'm gelling and having a great time with everybody; and there's a group of gay guys and I told some joke and they all go—Ooooh. And I said, "Look—if I were Margaret Cho or Kathy Griffin you'd be masturbating in your circle—shut the hell up!" And of course my favorite joke that I love for the gay community is, "Come on straight people—it's 2010—if you let us marry each other, we'll stop marrying you!"

CM: Do you have any projects coming up you'd like to talk about?

JS: I am actually up for consideration for an Emmy nomination for my work on *The Closer*. I will be in a new series in June on MTV called *Warren The Ape*—which is sort of like *House* meets *Curb Your Enthusiasm*—and I did my first sock puppet-to-human acting. [Laughs].