

The logo for new Theater corps is displayed in white text on a black rectangular background. The word "new" is in a simple, lowercase sans-serif font. "Theater" is written in a large, stylized, handwritten script font. "corps" is in a smaller, lowercase sans-serif font, similar to "new".

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## ESCAPE FROM BELLEVUE

Rocking music and a heartfelt autobiographical confession about a rocker who falls prey to drug and alcohol addiction and finds a way back from the abyss; *Escape from Bellevue* is one not to miss

Reviewed by Ilena George

"It's like a surprise party for fuck-ups," Christopher John Campion says of the intervention staged by his friends and family to try and get him into rehab. Campion, lead singer of the band Knockout Drops, recounts his experiences with drug and alcohol addiction, hospitalizations in the psychiatric ward of New York's Bellevue Hospital and eventual recovery in *Escape from Bellevue*—a series of monologues interspersed with rock songs currently in an open-ended run at the Village Theatre.

Campion is charming, frank and wryly funny as he candidly explains the consequences of his former lifestyle, from losing his spot in his band, to losing his connections with family and friends. "I call these years the wonder years, because I'm still wondering what the hell happened," he says. That's not to say Campion does not seem to get a kick out of recounting some of his wacky encounters with rodeo clowns, psych patients, and benevolent deli owners. The show grew out of Campion's autobiographical asides to the audience during Knockout Drops performances and the Drops' music punctuates and adds depth to the narrative while the venue's relatively small size makes the production feel like a personal rock concert.

The intimacy of the Village Theatre perfectly serves *Escape's* confessional tone, as does Cameron Anderson's spare but evocative set, reminiscent of an abandoned building—complete with stained old windows and exposed rivets—gives the production that unexpected but not unwelcome closeness of a stranger spilling out his life story in a dark bar. Between *Escape's* content and setting, it is as if Campion and the Knockout Drops are speaking directly to each member of the audience; this connection and Campion's charisma allows him to get away with discussing faith and "finding [his] light" without coming off as corny or clichéd.

Running at about ninety minutes without an intermission, Campion manages to cram in a lot of material, from the origin of the Knockout Drops, to three hospitalizations at Bellevue for threatening suicide (including one attempted hospitalization that ended instead with Campion being the first man in years to smooth-talk his way out of the hospital—giving the show its name), to drunken antics on the streets of New York. Lighting designer David Weiner similarly finds a way to unobtrusively fit in a range of neat tricks. Particularly effective are the harsh fluorescent lights signaling Campion's first incarceration within Bellevue, which nicely bookend the show and provide a visual context for Campion's eventual commitment to rehabilitating himself and his life, when they return during Campion's third and final stint at Bellevue. This time, the fluorescents are joined with some warmer floor lamps as Campion discusses his change of heart. Although the ending feels a bit abrupt and less detailed than some of his other exploits, Campion's compelling humor and pathos brings a dark time of his life into the light.

<http://newtheatercorps.blogspot.com/2007/06/escape-from-bellevue.html>