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Convert's a cutup

THEATER REVIEW

CIRCUMCISE ME

★★★

Bleecker Street Theatre, 45
Bleecker St.; 212-239-6200.

By FRANK SCHECK

WHEN writing an autobiographical one-person show, it helps to have colorful background material. Yisrael Campbell has it in spades.

Born Christopher Campbell in Philadelphia to Irish and Italian parents and raised Catholic, he turned to drugs and alcohol before he hit his teens. In search of a spiritual awakening, he converted to Judaism.

If you were expecting a somber, confessional exercise of an evening, this isn't it. As the former stand-up comedian tells it, he was drawn to Judaism by an ex-girlfriend and by Leon Uris' "Exodus," which made him want to "move to Israel and build the state and turn the desert green."

Unfortunately for him, it was 1982 and the work was pretty much done.

His eventual conversion was prompted by an ad in LA Weekly that read "So you want to be a Jew." After fulfilling the requisite religious conditions, he discovered, much to his chagrin, that he would have to undergo a "hatafat dam brit," or ritual blood-letting — a procedure he endured yet again when he became Orthodox, a reenactment of which is accompanied here by what painfully sounds like a guillotine.

As Campbell recites his life's twists and turns, he achieves a pitch-perfect blend of genuine sentiment and hilarious one-



Carol Rosegg

Catholic-born comic Yisrael Campbell retraces his path to Judaism in the one-man show "Circumcise Me."

liners. He's also deeply moving when, late in the show, he describes the horrific aftermath of a Jerusalem bombing in which several of his friends were killed.

Luckily for him and for us, his story has a happy ending. He married his Talmud instructor, and they now live in Jerusalem with their two adorable children. Mazel tov!