



Winter 1-14-2015

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Recommended Citation

University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University, "Woodstein '15 Staging Ambitious Autobiographical Play" (2015). *News and Events*. 2695.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2695>

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Woodstein '15 Staging Ambitious Autobiographical Play

Jan. 14, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—Theatre design and technology major Aaron Harris Woodstein '15 (Lincolnshire, Ill.) has gone from playwright to producer to stage his independent, autobiographical play *Turn That Thing Around* at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Woodstein raised funds for his project using the crowdfunding site Kickstarter. His experimental play explores themes of HIV testing, bipolar disorder and bisexuality. Inspired by Woodstein's own cross-country trip two years ago, the story follows a college freshman, Jack, en route to his summer camp haven. During the trip, Jack experiences a manic episode spurred by the delayed results of an HIV test. With a nonlinear narrative where the actors break the 'fourth wall,' the play attempts to create the chaos of a mind undergoing such an episode. The production is intended for mature audiences.

"This play tries to raise awareness on bipolar disorder," said Woodstein. "My audience is primarily 16 to 25 years old, which is the age that bipolar disorder comes up."

In order to visually demonstrate feelings of entrapment and ensuing chaos, Woodstein designed and commissioned a glass box that can be shattered on stage and then reassembled for the next show. Funds from the Kickstarter campaign purchased the box and other props from NewRuleFX, an effects and props company in the Los Angeles area.

Classmates of Woodstein's involved in the production include: Sean Grady '17, Liezl Jacobson '15, Blair Wright '15, George Fuentes '18, Paxton Johnson '18, Nolan Valdivia '17, Julie Jaudes '17 and Cong Vu '17. Friend Avi Kritzman, a theatre major at College of Lake County, is also a cast member. Iris Sowlat '15 is the director. Music major Luke McLoughlin '15 has composed the music for the production.

Turn That Thing Around will be staged Jan. 30 at 8 p.m., Jan. 31 at 2 and 8 p.m. and Feb. 1 at 2 p.m. in the Memorial Center's Young Main Lounge, 104 E. University Ave. Tickets are available for purchase online or at IWU's DugOut on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. until the Jan. 30 premier. The production is also a fundraiser the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Prairie Pride Coalition of Bloomington-Normal and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). A talkback with the cast will take place at the end of the performances.

"I want to open my own theatre and do this kind of theatre all the time," said Woodstein. "The kind that has meaning, for a cause or with a deep message in it."



Aaron Woodstein '15