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Play Premiered at IWU Last Year Earns College Theatre Festival Honor

Bob Aaron
Illinois Wesleyan University

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April 12, 1996

Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181*Fourth Freedom Award***Play Premiered at IWU Last Year
Earns College Theatre Festival Honor**

*"FRONT" Written by Former IWU Faculty Member,
Playwright Wins Residency with Robert Redford-Support Group*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--A play first staged at Illinois Wesleyan University last year, written by a former faculty member, has won first place honors in connection with the American College Theatre Festival, hosted this month by Washington, D.C.'s John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Playwright Robert Caisley, former IWU visiting instructor of theatre arts, won the Fourth Freedom Award for his play, "FRONT," a tale of World War II England.

He will receive the award during the American College Theatre Festival, April 15-23.

In addition to a \$2,500 first place prize, Caisley, who now lives in California, will be invited to participate in an all-expense-paid fellowship for a two-week residency during the Sundance Playwrights Laboratory, a project supported by actor Robert Redford, star of Academy Award-winning films such as "The Sting," "All the President's Men," and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid."

A staged reading of "FRONT" is slated for April 29 at Chicago's Apple Tree Theatre.

"FRONT" was performed with an IWU cast Jan. 13 at the Riffe Center in Columbus, Ohio, as part of the American College Theatre Festival Region III competition.

The Fourth Freedom Award draws its inspiration from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 Inaugural address in which he appealed for support of nations fighting in World War II to defend what he called the Four Freedoms--freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and *freedom from fear*.

The Fourth Freedom Award is offered annually for the best play written on the themes of world peace and international disarmament.

In an interview before "FRONT" was staged last April and May at IWU's McPherson Theatre, Caisley said: "I won't say it is an anti-war play, but I'd like people to begin to question why we fight wars. It's not really about democracy, freedom, the flag, or giving your life for your country--we fight wars for economic and political gain.

"I want to deglamorize war," he added, "especially since World War II is the most

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romanticized of all wars."

August Wilson, a two-time Pulitzer Prize and New York Drama Critics Circle Award winner for his plays depicting the Black experience in America, was among judges who selected Caisley's play for the award.

"FRONT" portrays the reaction of various characters to Nazi bombing raids and life on the English home front during the war.

Stories about the Blitz, recounted by Caisley's grandmother, were the play's starting point.

"My grandmother is a wonderful storyteller," said Caisley, who is British and grew up in England before moving to Canada and the United States. "My grandmother worked in a munitions plant during the war as does one of the characters in the play."

Caisley discussed the play in an interview before the premiere performance of "FRONT" last spring.

The title, "Front," has two meanings, he explained. First, it refers to the battle lines of war for soldiers and the home front for civilians. A second meaning, Caisley explained, refers to something new--the front of something--in terms of the play's characters having some hope for the future and the "FRONT" of a new cycle that may bring future wars.

The play begins on the eve of World War II and follows the lives of various characters throughout the conflict. We never see the end of the war, according to Caisley, only a vision of it.

Caisley's staging technique doesn't hide theatre mechanics from the audience. Costume changes, for example, are done in full view of the audience.

Caisley, the author of about 12 plays, wrote "FRONT" in January, 1995. Aspects of the play are outgrowths of a workshop course he taught in the fall of 1994, where students improvised about how they would react to air raids and other situations common in wartime England.

Caisley attended Rockford College and graduated from Eastern Illinois University. He earned a master's degree from Illinois State University and has performed in the Illinois Shakespeare Festival in Bloomington-Normal. He also has spent a summer at London's Royal Court Theatre participating in play writing workshops.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,850 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. --30--