



NEWS RELEASE

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THE BLACK REP AND COCA ANNOUNCE CO-PRODUCTION OF *FOUR LITTLE GIRLS: BIRMINGHAM 1963*

October Production Will Feature Students from Around the Metro Area

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 3, 2019 – The Black Rep and COCA announce that the two longstanding St. Louis organizations will collaborate to produce a student youth production of *Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963* by Christina Ham. Performances will be held October 18-20 and 25-27, in the newly opened Staenberg Performance Lab at COCA.

Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963 focuses on the “positive lives” of the four girls who were killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama - Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia D. Morris Wesley, and Addie Mae Collins. It highlights their dreams, goals and aspirations against the backdrop of the civil rights movement in 1963.

Renowned St. Louis theatre artist Jacqueline Thompson is the show’s Director, and Ron Himes, The Black Rep’s Founder and Producing Director, and Jennifer Wintzer, COCA’s Artistic Director of Theatre, are Co-Producers. The rest of the creative team includes music direction by Tre’von Griffith, movement direction by Jamie McKittrick, scenic design by Kendrick Lawson-Knight, lighting design by Jayson M. Lawshee, costumes by Claudia Brownlee, and sound design by Kareem Deanes. Carl Overly, Jr. is the stage manager and intern supervisor.

“This play’s themes are devastatingly still relevant today,” said Himes. “These talented young actors have their work cut out for them, but just as young people raised their voices during the Civil Rights movement these young actors will raise their voices in this production.”

Through story and song, the play shines a light on the girls’ dreams, their times with family and friends, and the trials and tribulations they faced as children living in a divided and segregationist city. A full chorus sets the tone with spirituals and anthems of the Civil Rights Movement such as “Amazing Grace,” “Oh, Freedom,” and “Woke Up This Morning.” The play acknowledges their death, but asks the audience to engage with their lives and who they might have become.

The production will also serve as a live training ground for students participating in the new St. Louis Tech Theatre Workforce Collaborative, a robust multi-year partnership between The Black Rep, the Boys & Girls Club of Greater St. Louis, and COCA, designed to inspire interest in technical theatre careers. The three organizations are building upon decades of experience in creating youth development programs of the highest quality to create the program. This program is a part of the Audience (R)Evolution: Cohort Grants program, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the professional not-for-profit American theatre, with start-up funding support from Region’s Bank.

“After just a few months in my role at COCA, it’s very exciting to see this multi-faceted collaboration come to fruition,” said Wintzer. “I think this production will be the first of many amazing opportunities for young performers and technical theatre artists to work with one of the best professional theatres in the country, in The Black Rep, while furthering their training at COCA.”

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ABOUT THE BLACK REP

Founded in 1976 by Producing Director Ron Himes, The Black Rep is the largest, professional African-American theatre company in the nation and the largest African-American performing arts organization in Missouri. After its inception, Himes began to take the company on the road, performing for people everywhere by touring college campuses, community centers and various art / theatre festivals. The Black Rep started to draw such huge crowds when they performed and in 1980, the company took residence in the former Greeley Presbyterian Church's sanctuary on the corner of St. Louis Avenue and 23rd Strret, renovating the interior into a theatre space. During the 1980's, the company began to hire guest actors, directors, designers and choreographers locally and nationally. In addition, The Black Rep began presenting regional dance companies and a musical film series. By 1986, the company became the only African-American theatre in the Midwest to operate under a contract with the Actor's Equity Association, guaranteeing union wages to its actors and stage managers. Later in the eighties, The Black Rep decided to narrow its focus to only producing African-American live theatre.

ABOUT COCA

Founded in 1986, COCA is the fourth largest multidisciplinary community arts center in the country, one of only 16 schools in the nation accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools (ACCPAS), and a national leader in innovative arts education. With a mission to enrich lives and build community through the arts, COCA serves 50,000 people of all ages and skill levels, from enthusiastic amateurs to emerging professionals—all taught by a faculty of distinguished arts educators. We provide meaningful arts experiences in our own studios, gallery and theatres as well as in schools, community centers and corporate settings in order to build a vibrant St. Louis that is creative, connected and inclusive. Visit www.cocastl.org to learn more.