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Dramatic Publishing



Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963



*Drama by
Christina M. Ham*

*"Joyfully illustrated with telling dialogue ...
We get to know each young lady as
an individual."* —*Twin Cities Daily Planet*

Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963 — Drama. By Christina M. Ham. Cast: 4w. plus an ensemble of at least 16, including 8w. Every child imagines what they want to be when they grow up. The four little girls who attended the 16th Street Baptist Church were no exception. *Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963* centers on Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Addie Mae Collins, four little girls who are multi-talented and bursting with promise and who share their hopes and dreams against the backdrop of the civil rights movement. While Denise dreams of becoming a doctor, Carole looks forward to the dress she will one day wear at the cotillion, Cynthia imagines her life as a mathematics professor at the local university, and Addie Mae envisions a life as a professional baseball player. The realities of the segregated political climate that will put a stop to these dreams swirl around them and eventually culminate in the fateful events of September 15, 1963. This searing play dares to examine what it's like to be a child in the most extreme circumstances. Commissioned and originally produced by SteppingStone Theatre. *Two int. sets. Approximate running time: 1 hour. Code: FC3.*

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Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963

By
CHRISTINA HAM



Dramatic Publishing

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“Originally produced by SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development,
St. Paul, Minnesota, Richard Hitchler, Artistic Director.”

Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963 was commissioned and originally produced by SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development, St. Paul, Minnesota, Richard Hitchler, Artistic Director, February 4-27, 2011.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Amanda Baumgart	Chorus #1
Haelee Bellfield	Lynn
Kornicia Carter	Fannie, Parent #2
Catie Deysach	Chorus #2
Isis Fulton-Smith	Flo, Parent #1
Cearah Hamilton	Carole Robertson
Henry Hitchler	Chorus #3
Nicholas Jackson	Chorus #6
Yazmin Lafleur-Donaby	Cynthia Wesley
Jasper Lea	Chorus #7
Tanisha Morgan	Chorus #8
Tatum Morris	Karen
Tyra Ramsey	Rhonda, Janie
Precia Rittman	Chorus #5
Alieyah Schauls	Sarah, Patient #1
Jeremy Skoler	Chorus #4, Patient #2
Essence Stiggers	Denise McNair
Kendall Thompson	Connie, Patient #3
Amani Ward	Addie Mae Collins

PRODUCTION STAFF

Signe Harriday	Director
Patty Lacy	Music Arranger / Director
Dean Holzman	Set Designer
Karin Olson	Lighting Designer
Barb Portinga.	Costume Designer
Brooke Nelson	Properties Designer
Benjamin McGinley	Video & Projection Designer
Alan Pagel	Technical Director / Sound Designer
Julie Odegard	Stage Manager
Marques Matthias	Assistant Stage Manager
Alexis Martin	Student Assistant Stage Manager
Madison Lea	Student Sound Board Operator

During the play, the word “nigger” is used several times. Here is a note from the playwright on its usage:

“As a playwright I feel like one of my primary responsibilities is to be a truthsayer. Whether it’s writing a fictional play or something that’s based on nonfictional events, at its core must be the truth.

When asked to write *Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963*, it was important that there be an authenticity not only to the period, but to what the real individuals—Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Addie Mae Collins—must’ve gone through. The bastardization of the word “Negro” into the word “nigger” and how it was used during this period to subjugate African-Americans (particularly in the Jim Crow South) is unfortunate. However, it was necessary for me to use this word in this play to document what life was like for these young ladies living in 1963 Birmingham, Alabama.

It is my hope that new generations that continue to hear this word that many African-Americans have lost their lives over will realize the ugliness that this word entails and its usage will dissipate over time.”

* * * *

The quote that the Chorus opens the play with (pp. 12-13, and again on pp. 64-65) is credited to Angela Davis.

Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963

CHARACTERS

Denise McNair 11 years old, African-American
Cynthia Wesley 14 years old, African-American
Carole Robertson 14 years old, African-American
Addie Mae Collins 14 years old, African-American
Connie 10 years old, African-American

Chorus of White Kids #1, #2, #3 and #4. . . Multiple ages
Chorus of African-American Kids #5, #6, #7 and #8. . . .
Multiple ages

The Ensemble is as follows:

Fannie 13 years old, African-American
Flo. 10 years old, African-American
Karen. 14 years old, African-American
Lynn 13 years old, African-American
Janie 16 years old, African-American
Sarah 10 years old, African-American
Rhonda 11 years old, African-American
Parent #1 Any age, African-American
Parent #2 Any age, African-American
Patient #1. Any age; any gender
Patient #2. Any age; any gender
Patient #3. Any age; any gender

NOTES

The ensemble acts as a Greek chorus throughout the play. The action should be fluid and continuous.

Roles can be double and triple cast where appropriate except for the actors playing Denise, Carole, Cynthia and Addie Mae.

TIME

September 1963.

SETTING

In and around Birmingham, Alabama, and the 16th Street Baptist Church.

Four Little Girls: Birmingham 1963

(The lights come up slowly to reveal projected footage of the time period: September 1963. Martin Luther King, sit-ins, protests, Medgar Evers, water hoses, the Klu Klux Klan, arrests, etc. These images may continue to play in a loop reflecting the pattern of hatred that permeates over this "Magic City." Through these images we are unfurled into the pulse of the period. The audio of George Wallace's infamous "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" may also play. A musical medley of "Wade in the Water/In That Great Getting Up Morning" plays while the ENSEMBLE files in singing these verses as they take their place behind the choir rail. This medley will continue to underscore this montage.)

CYNTHIA, CHORUS MEMBER #2, CONNIE.

Wade in the water

CAROLE, LYNN.

Wade in the water, children,

CYNTHIA, CHORUS MEMBER #2, CONNIE.

Wade in the water

ENSEMBLE.

God's a-going to trouble the water

SARAH.

See that host all dressed in white

ENSEMBLE.

God's a-going to trouble the water

ADDIE MAE.

The leader looks like the Israelite

ENSEMBLE.

God's a-going to trouble the water

Hold on, hold on.

Paul and Silas bound in jail,

Had no money for to go to their bail.

Hold on, hold on,

Keep your eyes on the prize.

Hold on, hold on.

CHORUS MEMBERS #5, #7, CAROLE, ADDIE MAE.

See that band all dressed in red

ENSEMBLE.

God's a-going to trouble the water

CHORUS MEMBER #5, #7, CAROLE, ADDIE MAE.

The Holy Ghost a-coming on me

ENSEMBLE.

God's a-going to trouble the water

Hold on, hold on.

Paul and Silas began to shout.

The jail door opened and they walked out.

Hold on, hold on,

Keep your eyes on the prize.

Hold on, hold on.

Freedom's name is might sweet.

Black and white are gonna meet.

Hold on, hold on,

Keep your eyes on the prize.

Hold on, hold on.

Wade in the water

Wade in the water, children,

Wade in the water

God's a-going to trouble the water

Wade in the water

Wade in the water, children,

Wade in the water

God's a-going to trouble the water

CAROLE.

Hold on.

(This unsettling montage finally gives way to city landscape images of Birmingham and its streets, neighborhoods, buildings, factories and people, until...

The projections fade away to reveal the stained glass windows that represent 16th Street Baptist Church on our stage. An underscore of the above medley continues to play during this scene.

Projection: SUNDAY - *An exterior still of 16th Street Baptist Church.)*

CHORUS MEMBER #1. "What bothers me most /

CHORUS MEMBER #2. Is that their names /

CHORUS MEMBER #3. Have been virtually erased /

CHORUS MEMBER #5. Erased!

CHORUS MEMBER #4. They are inevitably referred to /

CHORUS MEMBER #5. As

ENSEMBLE. "the four black girls" /

CHORUS MEMBER #6. Killed in the Birmingham church
bombing.

CHORUS MEMBER #7. I would like to remember... /

CHORUS MEMBER #8. ...the positive lives /

CHORUS MEMBER #7. They claimed for themselves /

CHORUS MEMBER #3. As teenage girls.

CHORUS MEMBER #5. Along with our memories /

CHORUS MEMBER #4. Of that horrible day /

CHORUS MEMBER #3. And what it symbolized /

CHORUS MEMBER #2. I would also like us all to consider what /

(CAROLE, CYNTHIA, ADDIE MAE and DENISE slowly emerge from the ENSEMBLE.)

CAROLE. Carole Robertson /

CYNTHIA. Cynthia Wesley /

ADDIE MAE. Addie Mae Collins /

DENISE. And Denise McNair /

ENSEMBLE. Might have become.”

CHORUS MEMBER #1. Before we got /

CHORUS MEMBER #2. What it was like to have a kid’s
life /

CHORUS MEMBER #3. We first learned what it meant to
be warriors.

CHORUS MEMBER #8. Thousands of us done already /

ENSEMBLE. Marched against segregation /

CHORUS MEMBER #5. Been arrested /

CHORUS MEMBERS #5, #8 & FANNIE. Jailed /

SARAH, KAREN, FLO, CHORUS MEMBER #2. Blasted
by high-pressure fire hoses /

ADDIE MAE, CAROLE, CONNIE, LYNN. Clubbed by
police officers /

CYNTHIA, DENISE, CHORUS MEMBER #1, RHONDA.
And attacked by they dogs.

CHORUS MEMBER #5. Despite these things /

DENISE, CYNTHIA, CAROLE, ADDIE MAE. Each of us
has had a dream.

(CYNTHIA walks forward separating herself from the ENSEMBLE.)

CYNTHIA. Seem like every day we was reminded:

(CHORUS MEMBER #1 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBER #1. Stay on your side of the street.

(CHORUS MEMBER #2 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBER #2. Stay in your place.

ADDIE MAE *(points to the other side)*. Meanwhile they got to /

CHORUS MEMBERS #1-4 *(high-fives among one another)*. Go where we want—do as we please.

(CAROLE steps forward from the ENSEMBLE to join CYNTHIA.)

CAROLE. Every day all we got was a heavy dose of the awful “d” word.

(CHORUS MEMBER #3 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE as CAROLE moves back to the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBER #3. Don’t / sit

(CHORUS MEMBER #4 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE to join in the “don’t” chorus.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #3 & #4. Don’t / eat

(CHORUS MEMBER #5 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #1, #3 & #4. Don't / drink

(CHORUS MEMBER #2 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #1 & #2. Don't / think

(CHORUS MEMBER #3 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #1-3. Don't / live

(CHORUS MEMBER #4 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #1-4. Or, breathe here.

(DENISE steps forward from the ENSEMBLE to join CYNTHIA and CAROLE.)

DENISE. At home it was...

(CHORUS MEMBER #5 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE.)

CHORUS MEMBER #5. Don't / worry

(CHORUS MEMBER #8 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE to join CHORUS MEMBER #5.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #5 & #8. Don't hold your head /
down

(CHORUS MEMBER #7 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE to join CHORUS MEMBERS #5 and #8.)

CHORUS MEMBERS #5-8. Don't get caught up in all that "mess."

(ADDIE MAE steps forward from the ENSEMBLE to join DENISE, CYNTHIA and CAROLE.)

ADDIE MAE *(to the other girls)*. Thought "mess" was what Mama called my hair.

CYNTHIA. "Mess" means the protests.

ADDIE MAE. And my hair—sometimes.

CAROLE. The protests our families won't let us go to.

DENISE. Too young.

ADDIE MAE. Too dangerous.

CYNTHIA. Whether they like it or not we already part of the movement and there ain't nothing they can do to stop it.

(CYNTHIA, DENISE, ADDIE MAE and the ENSEMBLE resume their places behind the choir rail. CAROLE stays as the lights shift. She begins to yawn.)

CAROLE. Daddy, I'm sleepy.

(CHORUS MEMBER #5 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE as CAROLE's father.)

CHORUS MEMBER #5. If you ain't feel up to going to church you can forget about going out anywhere else.

(CHORUS MEMBER #5 returns to the ENSEMBLE.)

CAROLE. On Sundays, 16th Street Baptist come first. So...when my alarm goes off... *(The sound of an alarm going off.)* ...I get up.

(CAROLE returns to the ENSEMBLE while DENISE steps forward.)

DENISE. By the time she's getting up... *(Points to CAROLE.)* ...Mama's already taking my hair out of the pin curls she put in Saturday night.

(CHORUS MEMBER #8 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE and pulls a bobby pin from DENISE's hair.)

CHORUS MEMBER #8. Gal, I swear I think you left half them pins on your pillow.

DENISE. So, I gotta redo some of 'em and hope that by the time I leave the house—my hair'll be ready.

(DENISE returns to the ENSEMBLE while ADDIE MAE steps forward.)

ADDIE MAE. For me: a freshly starched dress and a yellow ribbon for my hair.

(ADDIE MAE ties a ribbon into her hair and returns to the ENSEMBLE while CYNTHIA steps forward.)

CYNTHIA *(looks at her feet)*. Patent leather shoes—polished—and a purse...

(O.S. throws a purse to her.)

CYNTHIA *(cont'd)*. ...to match.

(CYNTHIA steps into the ENSEMBLE. CHORUS MEMBER #1 steps forward with ribbons and a barrette.)

CHORUS MEMBER #1. Can't I wear barrettes and ribbons to Sunday service?

(CHORUS MEMBER #2 steps forward from the ENSEMBLE as the "mother.")

CHORUS MEMBER #2. Gal, you better choose one or the other.

CHORUS MEMBER #1. Guess it's ribbons today.

(CHORUS MEMBERS #1 and #2 step back into the ENSEMBLE as CHORUS MEMBER #3 steps forward showing off a dress.)

CHORUS MEMBER #3. I wear my mama's dress from when she was a little girl. The hem keep coming undone, but she swear she just gone keep fixing it 'til there ain't nothing left.

(CHORUS MEMBER #3 steps back into the ENSEMBLE as CAROLE steps forward.)

CAROLE *(holds out her hand)*. I have to remember to get Sunday's tithe from Mama after Saturday's dinner.