



Off- Off- Broadway Review
'Spin Cycle'
Washing Machine
Reviewed by Judd Hollander

From some very unlikely source material has sprung an extraordinary piece of theatre with the one-person work *Washing Machine*. The work is based on a real-life incident of a five year-old girl who was killed after being trapped in such a device in a commercial Laundromat and, according to the text was "scalded, violently tumbled and ultimately asphyxiated." **Michael Chamberlin & Jason Stuart**, the creators of the piece (aided by the brilliant work of performer **Dana Berger**) put the audience front, center and right in the middle of this heartbreaking tragedy.

While starting and ending with the little girl in the machine (an imaginative and excellent set by **Akiko Kosaka**, with good lighting by **Ben Kato**) the play wisely doesn't spend too much time looking at the situation through her curious and terrified eyes. Rather the play examines the people in this child's sphere of existence who indirectly contributed to her death. There's her anguished mother who left the Laundromat to make a phone call; her step-brother caught in the comical and painful throes of adolescence who goaded his sister into the machine after climbing in and out of it himself; the owner of the Laundromat worried about keeping his business open in the wake of the publicity over the death; and a crotchety old man who tried to use the machine earlier that day only to find it wouldn't start (after he put money in). There's also an insurance adjuster who has perhaps the toughest job of all, figuring out what this girl's life was worth and translate a human tragedy into a dollar and cents equation.

Although all the characters come across as quite real, the insurance adjuster rings the truest of all. One can watch the others as they explain their role in the event, mentally analyze or second guess their actions, and perhaps come up with a different result. But the adjuster represents the everyman (and woman) of the story; as she and the audience tries to figure out where to place the blame - if there is a blame to be placed. While there's certainly more terror, anguish and rage in the girl and her family, it's through the adjuster we see the frustration and the desperate need to make sense of out what has happened.

Berger is excellent playing the multiple roles, effectively transforming from one to the next, and making each seem three-dimensional and believable. All the while adding pieces to a story (presented in a non-linear fashion at times) which gradually comes together to form the tragedy we know is coming. At the beginning of the show one only sees a helpless little girl, but by the end, the audience is watching a living, breathing person they come to care about, making the finale all the more wrenching.

It also helps that Chamberlin directed this production, knowing exactly the story he and Stuart wanted to tell, and telling it superbly. **Berger, Stuart and Chamberlin are also able to bring out a surprisingly (for this type of story) amount of humor in the piece** - which is a welcome relief from the many more dark moments.

One should keep an eye out for *Washing Machine*. Though its run at the Chocolate Factory is over, it will surely turn up again somewhere and when it does, it is not to be missed.