

**Washing Machine**  
Fist In The Pocket Theater  
Reviewed by Dan Bacalzo- July 1, 2008

---



Her face pressed close to a small, clear plastic bag containing water, Dana Berger widens her eyes and mouth into a look of horror. This is just one of the many striking images within *Washing Machine*, Jason Stuart's solo play, currently at the Sanford Meisner Theater. Inspired by a real-life tragedy wherein a young girl drowned within a laundromat washing machine, the work is unevenly performed by Berger, but still manages to make an impression, thanks largely to a strong design team serving the vision of director Michael Chamberlin.

Berger enacts a number of characters of various ages and genders, including the drowned girl's anguished mother, her sullen but aggressive stepbrother, her best friend, the owner of the laundromat, and an old man who plays a crucial role in the accident. Most of these roles are sketched in very broadly, with caricatured mannerisms and vocal intonations. However, the longer Berger stays within a character, the more nuances she's able to bring out. Unfortunately, the script calls for her to switch roles with a great amount of frequency. The actress is most consistently convincing as an insurance investigator who becomes obsessed with the case. Speaking in a measured tone, she puzzles over the actions and inactions of those involved and wonders what the dead girl felt in her final moments.

Stuart has constructed his script as something of a mystery story, with each successive speech by the various individuals affected shedding more and more light on what happened. He stops shy of spelling out every single detail, but provides enough information so that the audience has a pretty clear idea of which individuals share the bulk of the blame for the young girl's death.

Ben Kato's brilliant lighting design includes saturated washes that occasionally bathe the stage in blue, green, or purple to eerie effect. Also notable is a lighting special that gives the illusion of water slowly spinning around the large, plastic dome-like structure that dominates Akiko Kosaka's set design (and which represents the washing machine). Elizabeth Rhodes' sound design sets the mood, mixing noises associated with the running of a washing machine (rushing water, mechanical clicks, hums, etc.) with musical selections ranging from a subtle piano underscoring to the loud blasting of The Who's song, "Teenage Wasteland." All of the best elements within the production come together for a stylized climax, wordlessly performed by Berger, that is both powerful and moving.