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Washing Machine *** Stars

Fist In The Pocket Theater@

Sanford Meisner Theatre

By Jason Stuart. Dir. Michael Chamberlin.
With Dana Berger. 1hr. No intermission.



H2-OH NO Berger goes to a watery death.
Photograph: Michelle Enfield

Jason Stuart and Michael Chamberlin's loose retelling of a five-year-old's tragic death inside a washing machine is audaciously entertaining, but limited by its rigid form, which replicates the title appliance—in other words, too much spin. The basic aesthetic succeeds: Akiko Kosaka crafts a symbolic, Tim Burton–esque tunnel with clear, suspended water bags and Brendan McCall contributes jarring choreography, which turns a little girl's game into an industrial *danse macabre* set to Philip Glass and the Who. Chamberlin's superb direction is a knockout, too, cleanly accenting each shift with a grim *ka-chunk*. But Stuart's script churns too roughly through the dirty sins of its characters, and though Dana Berger tackles the solo material like a fullback for Tide, the effect is too mechanical, too precise.

In the opening sequences, the action skips from an interpretive drowning and the mother's mournful monologue to the cheery sorrow of the girl's best friend, who recalls how they once chased monsters like "the Birdman." There are also flaky characters: a creepy hunchback straight out of *Final Destination* and the Laundromat's owner, who is given a comic Russian accent to ease her exposition. As the script picks up speed, Berger dissolves into the roles. She leaves behind the chunky exaggeration and flows more naturally between characters, like an insurance adjuster sent to "compensate this girl's absence," and a stepson who is drowning in trouble of his own—premature puberty. *Washing Machine* turns in the right direction, calling to mind Clay McLeod Chapman's grisly beauty, but it never fully puts us through the wringer.

— Aaron Riccio