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Photo: The Wilma Theater

The Floor Wipers: A Comedy's Call for Action

by Lauren Putty White

The Wilma Theater's *The Floor Wipers*, part of their local *HotHouse Shorts Series*, hits us in the funny bone from the first "elbow bump" in its hilarious Covid tale of two NBA team cleaning ladies. Five minutes in and I am laughing out loud at the realness of sisterhood at its finest. Two strangers develop an immediate connection because they are two women of color serendipitously on the same shifts together. With masks on, mops in hand, and a myriad of opinions to share, this dazzling duo takes us on a quick, yet fulfilling journey of what it's like to be a brown, working-class female in these pandemic times.

Creator/performer [Taysha Marie Canales](#) and writer/director [Akeem Davis](#) masterfully introduce the two main characters as relatable individuals with distinct personalities and intentions. It's July 2020, Canales and writer/performer [Jaylene Clark Owens](#) enter wearing Black Lives Matter t-shirts ready to tackle the grueling job of wiping athletes' sweat off the floor. One glance at each other and boom, instant BFF's! Owens' character, Tiana, establishes early that she is there to meet her future husband, boasting that the Lord "always wanted her to marry a basketball player." Meanwhile, Canales' character, Racine, is convinced this gig will help her work off her "quarantine 15." One of the wittiest written moments in the sketch happens when the Compton Kidz Club sings the national anthem before the game. The two women are pleasantly surprised when the presumed squeaky group of little kids turns out to be an all-star sounding choir! The captions and over the top conversational gestures between the two women are hysterical, while their eyes and reading of each others' eyes say it all. In this scene, I feel seen.

Throughout a series of new days and new shifts, the conversations range from talk of the dreadful Zoom wedding ordeal (which I am sure we all are familiar with at this point) to Tiana explaining her PCI, "Player Compatibility Index," which is a list of compatible players from each team. She gloats that it keeps her love life organized. Racine then reminisces about her pre-Covid plans to "travel abroad" to Texas, from Orlando, Florida that is. Trump catching Covid stirs up more conversation, along with mention of anti-maskers and the shortage of toilet paper.

The narrative does a quick turnaround towards the end as the characters have changed into t-shirts with the big letters VOTE on the front. It's now October 2020, the pandemic still surges, and the two begin to fear that they could lose their jobs. Suddenly reality sets in, and Racine questions, "What's out there but danger for us," speaking of the uncertainty of Covid while living during a time when Black women are being shot in their sleep. Life gets real again, real quick, and leaves me thinking about the other impactful issues burdening this world outside of the pandemic.

To sum it up, *The Floor Wipers* cleverly brings on the laughs while insisting that racism and classism are far from being resolved—a smart comedy with a lowkey call to action.

[*The Floor Wipers*](#), The Wilma Theater HotHouse Shorts, streaming on demand until May 15, 2022.

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January 21, 2022