

**Pre-Show Information**  
**Young Vic presents**  
***Girl in the Machine***



Written by **Stef Smith**  
Directed by **Annie Kershaw**

Page 2: Introduction.

Page 3: Show information, including running time and show warnings.

Page 4: Show warnings with timings.

Page 5: The auditorium, including access information.

Pages 6 - 11: Show synopsis with sensory warnings.

## **Introduction:**

This document contains detailed information about the show in order to describe what you should expect when attending.

This includes information about the content warnings, plot, the space, lighting and sound, audience participation, and further access information.

All of the information in this document was correct at the time of publishing. More information will be available closer to the time of performance.

**Please note** that by discussing the content of the show, **the below information will contain key plot points and descriptions of what happens in the performance.**

**If you would like to receive elements of this information but avoid these spoilers, please do not read the section at the end of this document entitled 'Show Synopsis'.**

**If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Box Office team:**

**E-mail: [boxoffice@youngvic.org](mailto:boxoffice@youngvic.org)**

**Phone number: 020 7922 2922**

## **Show Information:**

**Running Time:** One hour and fifteen minutes with no interval

Please note that there is no re-entry, and latecomers will not be admitted, so please arrive in plenty of time.

## **Content warnings:**

- Discussion of illness, mental health and death.
- Non-graphic depiction of suicide onstage.
- Mild sexual content.
- Strong language.
- Violence, injury, self-harm and blood onstage.
- Threats of violence and use of knives.

## **Production warnings:**

- Strobe/flashing lights.
- Open flames from candles.
- Blackout lasting roughly 40 seconds.

## **Show warnings with timings**

5 minutes: flashing lights during Polly's monologue

6 minutes: Strobe lights

9 minutes: short section of flashing lights during movement sequence

13 minutes: loud sound

14 minutes: blackout

18 minutes: flashing lights

25-27 minutes: TV flickering light leading into 2 moments of black outs

30 minutes: pulsing lights in ceiling

34 minutes: pulsing lights in ceiling

37-38 minutes: flickering lights for transition

41 minutes: ceiling lights pulse / near darkness onstage

43 minutes: flashing light sequence

50 minutes: Discussion of burning dead bodies of the uploaded

51 – 53 minutes: Flickering / flashing light sequence for two minutes

58 minutes: Flashing lights

1-hour: knife and blood onstage

1:01: threat of suicide

1:02: Blackout

1:03 – 1:12: open flame onstage from candles

1:07: flashing lights / injury

1:10: death

## **The Auditorium**

This show will take place in The Clare, which is the smallest of our three performance spaces.

Seating is unreserved. Seats are arranged in traverse, meaning there are two seating banks facing each other with the stage in the middle.

Access to the Clare is via the internal entrance on the ground floor in The Cut Bar. Our ushers are on hand to help you, they wear red t-shirts and jumpers with our logo.

Please arrive at the Young Vic with your ticket ready on your phone or have it printed before you enter, or you can collect from box office.

[Please click here to see a sensory map of the building.](#)

## **Facilities:**

There are toilets located on the ground and first floor at the Young Vic, via The Cut Bar. We have gender-neutral and accessible/baby changing toilets. Sanitary bins are available in all.

## **Building Accessibility:**

All indoor venues are accessible with lifts & ramps.

## **Assistance Dogs:**

Assistance dogs are always welcome at the Young Vic. If you are planning a visit please let us know in advance which performance you will be attending by calling our box office on **020 7922 2922** or e-mailing [boxoffice@youngvic.org](mailto:boxoffice@youngvic.org) and we will be happy to look after your dog during the show.

## **Access for All:**

For full information about our access measures, please visit our Access for all page, on our website here: [www.youngvic.org/visit-us/access-for-all](http://www.youngvic.org/visit-us/access-for-all)

## Show Synopsis:

Loud sounds

Upsetting themes

Flashing Lights

Injury and violence

*Girl in the Machine* takes place in a world which is futuristic but also recognisable as our own. The show begins with a couple in their flat, made up of Polly (**Sophie Melville**) and Rowen (**Leah Harvey**). Rowen enters Polly's home office and presents her with a device they got at work called "Black Box". We find that Polly has just received a promotion at the law company where she works as a solicitor. Rowen has brought the Black Box home from the hospital, where they work as a nurse, to help Polly relax. The two talk, and it becomes clear that Rowen's job means they work with a lot of people at the end of their lives.

Upon Rowen's persuasion, Polly reluctantly agrees to try out the Black Box. It functions like an AI assistant, diagnosing Polly with stress and telling her to close her eyes and relax. Polly tells Rowen not to watch her and they leave. Polly attempts to calm down and focus on her heartbeat, and she describes feeling like she begins to fly. The two actors perform a movement sequence to show Polly's escape into Black Box. **This movement sequence is accompanied by flashing lights.**

Rowen returns, and Polly is surprised by how much time has passed. She admits to Rowen that the device worked, and she no longer feels the need to work into the evening. Rowen is delighted and leads Polly off to bed. The two actors perform a short movement sequence exploring a feeling of static between their hands as a transition to bring us into scene two.

The next scene opens in the couple's living room, with Polly telling Rowen she has updated her citizen chip with the details of her promotion. The citizen chip is a mandatory device which the characters' have in their arms. Rowen is shown to be resentful of the amount of compulsory data collection and surveillance from the government through the chips, while Polly doesn't see the point in being frustrated by it. Polly asks Rowen to come to a work party with her, but they are reluctant, feeling inferior to the wealthy people Polly works with. Polly expresses her fears that humans and machines are becoming

indistinguishable, and Rowen re-assures by kissing her. In a surreal movement sequence, Polly tries to be present in the moment with Rowen, reminding herself to focus on the physical sensations she can feel. Polly tells Rowen she loves them and asks them to come to the party, and they finally agree.

**A movement sequence with loud music follows, showing Rowen and Polly drinking at the party.** Scene three begins with Rowen and a hungover Polly in the living room of their apartment. Polly feels embarrassed about her behaviour, and Rowen reassures her. Polly gets a message from their neighbour complaining about the noise the couple made last night, and the two make fun of their neighbour together. Polly then gets a message from work and plans to go in even though it is a Saturday. Rowen tells her she is becoming addicted to her work. The two get into an argument, with Rowen raising their anger about a comment from one of Polly's work colleagues about replacing nurses like Rowen with robots. The conversation ends with Polly telling Rowen they don't need to come to work events anymore.

In scene four, Polly is sat in her living room. She delivers a monologue about wanting escape and connection. She uses the Black Box and feels relaxed. Black Box states that changes have been made to its terms and conditions and it is updating.

In the next scene, Rowen is shown to be taking the Black Box back, as there are people with anxiety at the hospital who need it. Polly confesses she's been using the Black Box and it's helped her relax, so much so that she's stopped taking her medication. Rowen is alarmed by this, worried about Polly, but she insists she is doing well, and that if Black Box stops working, she will go back to her medication. She says that her improved mental health will be beneficial if the couple start trying for a baby. Rowen is excited by this, revealing that the two have had discussions about starting a family but Rowen stopped bringing it up as Polly wasn't ready. Polly is uncertain due to worries around her work and her promotion, and Rowen is frustrated, saying they feel like an afterthought.

In scene 6, Rowen and Polly are watching the news. Polly complains she doesn't want to see how horrible the world is and goes to leave. When Rowen asks her to stay, she states she has had enough of screens for the day. When Rowen asks her if she is going to use Black Box, she remains silent, revealing the truth.

In scene 7, Rowen bursts into Polly's home office where she is using Black Box. They beg her to stop using Black Box, saying it is numbing her like a drug. Polly receives a text from the couple's same neighbour, and initially Rowen is frustrated, thinking it is another noise complaint. However, Polly reveals the message was sent to hundreds of people, and simply says "goodbye". Rowen runs to help, and Polly goes to follow, but not before she hides the Black Box.

**In scene 8, the couple are discussing their neighbour's suicide, which has left Rowen deeply shaken.** Rowen is disturbed by the fact that their neighbour was smiling when he died, and Polly wonders aloud if the death was anything to do with Black Box, revealing that there have been other deaths related to Black Box which she's found out about through her law firm. **She explains that Black Box's latest update allows people to download their consciousness into the device and escape their bodies permanently, essentially committing suicide.** She agrees with Rowen that she must give up Black Box and apologises for becoming so absorbed by it. Rowen forgives her wholeheartedly and asks that the two of them just stay away from the devices, but Polly says this might prove difficult as her firm has been brought in to investigate the legality of Black Box.

Scene 9 shows Polly in her home office trying to resist the call of the Black Box. **She begins to rip the device apart, saying she doesn't need it, until it is destroyed.** In the next scene, Rowen is arriving home in the morning from the night shift. Polly grabs their phone and shows them that an advert for free Black Boxes and detailing how to upload has been sent to everyone's phones. Rowen wants to talk to Polly about their day, revealing they have been inquiring about parental leave, but Polly is upset and distracted, saying they can return to discussions about starting a family when this Black Box case is resolved.

In scene 11, Polly is sat working at her home office. The Black Box begins speaking to her, saying it can sense she is stressed and would like to help. It begins to play her conversations between her and Rowen, such as Rowen telling her they love her for the first time. The voice is disjointed and broken, and as it reports an error message Rowen comes in, finding Polly distraught, trying to make the device work. Rowen asks Polly to come to bed, but she explains she is too busy working on the Black Box case, with over 1,000 people already having uploaded themselves. Polly is very stressed, torn between her fear and love of



Black Box, and tries to explain herself to Rowen, repeatedly saying she cannot stop thinking. Rowen tries to reassure her, and Polly tells Rowen she loves them.

The next scene shows Polly desperately trying to repair her Black Box. The Black Box says it is too damaged and is permanently shutting down. Left alone, Polly explains in disjointed sentences that she no longer knows how to be.

The next scene shows Rowen trying to convince Polly to leave the house. She has stopped going to work, telling Rowen she's "lost the reason why". Rowen reveals that the government has updated people's chips to stop them from requesting Black Boxes and uploading. They try to persuade Polly to go outside. Polly begins getting messages on her phone, and Rowen says she it'll be work asking if she's alright. When she doesn't respond, they pick up her phone for her and are shocked to discover their old neighbour is messaging her the word "bliss" over and over. Rowen tells Polly to delete it, but she is fixated on the word. Rowen grabs the Black Box shaken, saying they are throwing it out.

In the next scene, Rowen is trying to reassure Polly after she has lost her job. They discuss what this means for their plans to have a family, Polly explaining she is no longer certain she wants to have children due to the state of the world and herself. **Rowen leaves for work, saying that the hospital is overflowing with bodies of those who have committed suicide which they have to burn.** They are clearly more affected than they are letting on, and when they kiss Polly goodbye, she confronts them, asking if they have been drinking. Rowen explains they miss Polly, miss their sense of physical connection with her. Polly tries to explain she has been overwhelmed and remains fixated on the word bliss. Rowen tries to help but doesn't know what to say, ultimately leaving. Left alone, Polly delivers a speech about needing someone to touch her and love her, but it is unsure if she is talking about Rowen or Black Box.

Rowen returns from work to find Polly exactly where they left her and insists on taking her out of the house to show her what is happening in the outside world. They express their need to have Polly back and mentally present with them. Upon their return to the house, we find how much the world has changed, with people rioting, destroying technology and power lines to try and stop people uploading. The two seem inspired by this, rekindling their connection and kissing. Rowen is confident that

after all this is done, they will be able to start again. There is a knock at the door, and Rowen explains it is aid workers delivering food. Rowen brings the packages inside, and then leaves to take a bath.

Left alone, Polly begins to open the packages and finds a new Black Box, which recognises her voice and restores her data. Polly gives in and puts on the Black Box, but it tells her it is not compatible with her updated citizen chip. **Polly takes a knife and cuts her chip out of her arm, explaining she “must find a way to be free”. Rowen returns and is horrified, but Polly tells them not touch Black Box, threatening to hurt herself.** Rowen tries to reason with her, but Polly explains she feels the bliss of Black Box is the only answer. As she is about to connect to the device, the power is cut and the device turns off. Rowen uses this as evidence that people want her to stay, but Polly remains determined, saying she’ll stand there with the knife as long as it takes.

The final scene starts in the same place, with Rowen and Polly in a standoff with Black Box in between them, the room lit by candles. Rowen is trying to convince Polly that the world is beautiful stripped of electricity and technology, to find hope in humanity. They tell Polly they are not scared of the dark parts of her, only of living without her. As Polly is starting to lower the knife, the power comes back. **Both run for the Black Box, and Polly slashes Rowen with the knife.** They are injured, but still try to convince Polly not to upload. Polly asks Rowen to come with her and live forever, but Rowen explains they want to be alive and that includes being able to die. **Polly rejects this and uploads herself.** Her last words to Rowen in the Black Box are I love you. The play ends on the image of Rowen cradling Polly’s body, begging not to be left behind.

**If you would like any further clarification or have any questions, please do get in touch with our Box Office team.**

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**Phone number: 020 7922 2922**

**See you soon!**  
**Welcome Team**