Welcome to this introduction to ***Girl in the Machine*** by Stef Smith, directed by Annie Kershaw with design by Khadija Raza.

The audio described performance will be on Friday 25 October at 7:45pm. There will be a touch tour 90 minutes before the show at 6.15pm, and the introductory notes will start at 7.30. The production lasts for 1 hour and 15 minutes, with no interval, and the live audio description will be given by Miranda Yates.

The play includes discussion of illness, mental health and death. Full content warnings and a synopsis can be found on the Young Vic website. The production includes the use of strobe and flashing lights, open flame from candles and a blackout lasting roughly 40 seconds.

The Young Vic describes the production like this: Polly loves Rowen but lately, that hasn’t felt like enough. Then Rowen brings home the Black Box, with its promises to cure depression, and in a flick of a switch changes everything. As Polly becomes more distant from the person she planned to share her life with, will her love for Rowen be enough to resist the draw of the eternal bliss that the Black Box offers?

The play is set in the near future and the design suggests a minimalist way of living, refined to the essentials. Both clothes and furniture are in pale, neutral shades without any decoration. The play moves rapidly through time in short scenes. The passing of time, sometimes in intervals as brief as 30 seconds, is indicated by a small change in costume or a shift in an actor’s position. Moments of non-naturalistic movement are used to suggest states of mind and interactions between the characters at a deeper level.

**Rowen** is played by Leah Harvey, a black actor in their late twenties with high cheekbones and a snub nose. Rowen has short Afro hair cut in a natural crop that’s slightly longer on top, and wears gold hoop earrings. They wear loose black jeans with turnups and a grey t-shirt, with a black blouson jacket and canvas pumps. Rowen is centered and often remains quite still and grounded while working through a thought. Their movements express care and consideration with an underlying strength.

**Polly** is played by Welsh actor Sophie Melville. She’s a white woman in her early thirties with a heart-shaped face with arching eyebrows. Polly wears her blonde hair loose, falling to mid back. A grey cotton vest top shows off her muscular arms, with slim black paper-bag style trousers cinched with a tie at the waist. In the flat, her feet are bare for most of the time. Polly moves rapidly, with a tense energy, her thoughts racing skittishly through her body like a series of electrical impulses.

Both performers change items of clothing to suggest time shifts – going to bed, Rowen wears blue checked pyjama bottoms and a grey t-shirt, and Polly wears blue checked pyjama shorts and her usual grey vest. Coming home from work, Rowen wears the black blouson jacket over turquoise hospital scrubs. Polly has a more corporate look: for an office party she puts on a pale green silk blouse, tucking it in at the waist, and adds smart black loafers.

*Girl in the Machine* is staged in the Clare, the Young Vic’s smallest space seating about 70 people . It’s a squarish room lined with panels of plywood up to the ceiling. Seating for the audience is arranged in traverse formation, with two rows of benches on either side of a long, narrow playing area which represents the open plan living space of Rowen and Polly’s flat.

There is 4 metre wide strip of pale grey carpet on the floor, and panels of the same width and colour extend up the walls at each end. Both end walls contain identical white doors. As audience members, we enter through one of these doors, which in performance becomes the door leading to the unseen bedroom. The door opposite leads out to the corridor of the apartment block. A single hook for a jacket hangs next to it.

At the bedroom end of the living space, a low bench upholstered in cream-coloured fabric is just big enough to serve as a sofa for two, at one end is a small round white coffee-table, and by the door a tripod style floor lamp with a cream shade and slim, black metal legs.

At the opposite end of the room, there is a high white table with two stools under it, serving as both desk and breakfast bar. The stools match the rest of the furniture, with cream seats and black metal legs. There’s a shelf under the table where Polly stores the tablet she uses for work. Between the desk and the outside door, there is a drinks trolley with chrome legs and glass shelves, holding several bottles of whisky and wine, along with tumbler glasses.

Floating above the whole space, of similar dimensions to the floor, is a ceiling panel divided into 21 squares – 7 along the length of the room, and 3 across. A dozen white domestic spotlights for the flat are suspended from the panel, but each square can also light up independently. A single bluish square of overhead light suggests a kitchen; when all the squares light up in warm orange light cascading from one side to the other, it suggests the glow of sunset.

The few technological props are key to the story: Polly’s tablet and phone, and the Black Box, a silver VR or Virtual Reality headset that’s worn over the eyes like an outsize pair of goggles. When in operation, it lights up with two lines of white, fluorescent light along the top and bottom.

**The Cast and Production Credits**

Rowen is played by Leah Harvey and Polly by Sophie Melville

The Voice of the Black Box is Jessica Temple

Designer Khadija Raza

Sound Designer Odinn Orn Hilmarsson

Lighting Designer Lucía Sánchez Roldán

Movement Director Nevena Stojkov

Intimacy and Fight Director Yarit Dor

*Girl in the Machine* is written by Stef Smith and directed by Annie Kershaw.

This is the end of the introduction to *Girl in the Machine*. If you have any questions or require further assistance, please call the Young Vic box office on 020 7922 2922.

Upcoming audio descriptions at the Young Vic include *The Little Foxes* by Lilian Hellman on Thu 19 Dec, 7:30pm and Sat 18 Jan, 2:30pm, and *Punch* by James Graham on Fri 14 Mar, 7.30pm & Sat 22 Mar, 2.30pm.