Midnight Movie

Story Synopsis: A Guide to the Scenes and Storylines

This is a story synopsis for *Midnight Movie* It is intended as a guide for anyone who would benefit from the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the scenes and storyline of the performance ahead of their visit to the theatre.

Should you have any questions regarding any aspect of *the Midnight Movie*, please email boxoffice@royalcourttheatre.com.

**WARNING:**

**This document contains a description of the full plot of the performance.**

**This performance includes a combination of changing light, sound and the use of drums.**

This play is a series of moments on the internet, while a person is having a sleepless night because they are in pain due to chronic illness. It is set on one side of a bed during the hours between midnight and dawn.

This performance includes Spoken English, British Sign Language, captioning, and audio description.

The set is a visual representation of the internet. The play happens in both a bedroom, and on the internet at the same time, so we wanted the place to look both domestic and virtual. The house might remind you of the cross section of a ‘Sims’ house. It’s wallpapered with billboard paper representing a deep midnight blue sky in California. There are palm trees and a city scape. The design is surrealist, playing with 2D printing and real 3D object (for example, the bed on stage is half real and half printed). At the front of the stage there are plants and a fish tank. On stage, there are a collage of objects - a drum kit, a small 1970’s electric organ, a see-through chair, a bright blue Venus De Milo statue, a trainset, rubber ducks, and so on. The internet we have made on stage is not a smart, perfect smooth looking interior. It is made up of collages of different images and objects, pixelated pictures, clashes of colours, playful layers of meaning. It’s like a fun house, but sometimes it is also frightening. Video-mapping projects moving digital textures onto the walls, and the sound is electronic and eerie in moments, and celebratory and rhythmic in others. Different fragments of Janelle Monae’s song ‘Make Me Feel’ play throughout until the end, when we hear one of the performers sing the song.

KEY:

A picture containing object, clock

Description automatically generated

Where you see this symbol, we are alerting you to moments that might be **emotional.**

Where you see this symbol, we are alerting you to moments that might surprise or shock you, such **as loud noises or sudden movements**.

Where you see this symbol, we are alerting you to **flashes of light or sudden/extreme lighting changes**.

NEW TAB -

THE WOMAN IN THE WATER TANK.



Loud drumming begins as screen rises and are played throughout scene.



A story about a woman in a hotel in Los Angeles. She is seen on security footage running into an elevator as though something is chasing her, but no one is there. The woman fights with the invisible thing. The video ends. The woman is found dead inside a hotel water tank with the lid closed.

NEW TAB -

THE GODDESS BY THE RIVER.



Gentle drums at the start of this section.

In the desert where Delhi now stands there was a goddess who was able to carry water with only her hands. One day she saw a god and goddess having sex by the river. From then on, she could not carry the water with her bare hands.

A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN

A scene about bodies. Bodies in the wrong places, places being wrong for certain bodies, stories about scary bodies, in the wrong places, etc.

NEW TAB -

BEFORE I GOT ILL.

At a party in Berlin, before the avatar knew that they were ill. The man that the avatar came with takes them to his apartment. His flatmate was a German film star about 15 years older than him. The flat had one bedroom, one bed, and a giant skylight stretched across its entirety. His body was perfect, and they had a lovely time together. Afterwards, as the avatar wandered around the apartment, they saw a man grinning down from the skylight. The avatar knew the man was a vampire and wished to turn him into dust.

NEW TAB -

THE DIGITAL BODY.

Perhaps that vampire was actually a digital body, watching from a distance.

A person asks to be touched.

NEW TAB -

THE GOD OF STRENGTH.



The god of strength was challenged to a contest by his enemies. His challenge was to empty a drinking horn full of wine. He kept drinking and drinking, but the horn did not empty. The god of strength drank until his body distorted, then finally gave up. His enemies confessed that the drinking horn was attached to the world’s oceans and during the contest he had nearly drunk them dry. When they showed the god a mirror, he had aged and could not recognise himself. Now an old man, the god died.

NEW TAB -

BLUE WHALE.

A conversation between a girl and someone on the internet. The girl is agreeing to a challenge. The first task is to watch a video at 4:32am. The person knows her address and will know if she has watched to the end of the video. The girl thought that the task would be harder. The other person tells her that it will get harder.

NEW TAB -

BEING IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE.



The avatar has received a notification from a Ukrainian man that they met in Poland. While drinking Polish lager in a bar with a small group of people, he had told them about his family and his trouble sleeping. After a few more drinks he tells them that he spends his sleepless nights on a website which has photographs of every person who has died at the prison that was the last place he knew his brother was. He does not know if his brother is dead, or no longer at the prison. The Ukrainian man tells them that he thinks he found his brother’s face, but that it is impossible. He leaves to go back to his hotel and continue looking at faces.

NEW LINK -

A VIDEO.



Drums.

A representation of the rocking of a rowboat on a vast and empty sea. One of the two performers dances, another plays the drums along with her movement, rolling with the rocking motion of the waves.

NEW TAB -

BLUE WHALE.

A conversation between a girl and someone on the internet – this someone is revealed as her ‘Blue Whale’. The girl is on the railway tracks and can see a train coming. The Blue Whale’s tracker is not loading fast enough, and the girl’s communication cuts out briefly. There is a sound of screaming metal on metal. The Blue Whale is angry. While on missions, communication is essential.

A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN

The avatar is reflecting on time – there is no such thing as time, when you are lying awake in pain in the night and the morning is closer than you want it to be.

Another moment about bodies in the wrong places, places that were meant to accommodate bodies. Scary stories.

The avatars reflect that the scariest things of all are: when you think you are alone but you are not, and when you think there is someone else there but you are alone.

BACK TO THE TAB -

MY LIFE BEFORE I GOT ILL.



When the avatar was ill, but was trying to pretend they were not, they lived in a warehouse by the river. In this warehouse lived an Australian man that everyone called Dingo. The avatar felt uneasy about friending him on Facebook. He may or may not have been the person who converted the warehouse in the first place. They paid him to do maintenance. He told them that the warehouse was haunted. Although the avatar had not experienced anything, one of their flatmates had. Over time they started regarding the ghost as if it were another flatmate; they left cake out for it and wished it “good night”. In winter, the pipes froze, and they hired a professional to fix the problem. They had their bins tipped over, and someone defecated on their doorstep. The ghost seemed angry. There was another freeze late in the spring, and after that the ghost disappeared. Dingo was found in the river when it thawed. Sometimes the avatar gets notifications from Facebook to say hi to Dingo. Digital bodies haunt the avatar, like the girl in the elevator from the very first scene.

A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN

The avatar is trying to find something else online.

The avatars dance, separately and then in unison.

The avatar is trying to find something else online, again.

BACK TO THE TAB -

BLUE WHALE.

A conversation between the girl and her Blue Whale. The girl is completing another challenge; eating her own menstrual blood. It makes her feel not so scared of herself.

BACK TO THE TAB -

TWO PLACES AT ONCE.



A story about silicone-eating ants unleashed in a data centre to feast on memory storage units. They destroyed the digital body of an entire company one tiny mouthful at a time. Then they were fumigated.

The avatar brings up the distinction “in real life”, and how you can ruin the digital with a cup of tea or by downloading the wrong file. Even though you can touch the digital, in the form of phones and other technologies, it does not feel “real”. The avatar says there were two women who were so convinced they were in a reality television show that they assassinated the brother of the North Korean dictator.

NEW THOUGHT -

A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN.

The avatar asserts that everything they are saying is completely true. Scary stories on the internet need to be true. Reality cannot be surprising if you already know the horrific and insane things that can happen.

BACK TO THE TAB -

TWO PLACES AT ONCE.

The Ukrainian man is leaving the bar in Poland. He is alone in the elevator. The man is going back to look at the photographs from the prison that his brother was last seen in. The hotel is a sort of ex-Communist warehouse conversion. He checks that there is no one on the skylight. The bathroom is decorated in the colours of the desert. The man runs a bath. The Ukrainian man is in a Midnight Movie. A Midnight Movie is a film that is too violent or sexy or queer or just plain weird to play at a normal time in a normal cinema. People are watching him from their cars at a drive-in. A woman in a fur coat gets into a strange man’s car. The man does not know what to do. Their breath steams up the windows. They sit and watch the Ukrainian man on the screen get into the bathtub. He does not want to frighten the woman by telling her she is in the wrong car. He thinks they might kiss, and when she turns towards him, he hears something.

NOT ONLINE -

IN BED.

The avatar has woken their partner. Their partner takes them in their arms, and they can feel them breathing. The avatar is in pain. Their head is throbbing, like a drum being hit. Their partner’s breath is not helping. One of the performers sings Gustav Mahler’s "*Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*" (“I’ve turned my back on the world”) and the other moves her hands with the music.

Pain is keeping them awake. They need to sleep so that they can work tomorrow. This though sets off a spiral about time and shame, and feeling weak and furious, which is the opposite of getting to sleep.

The avatar says that they don’t know how people laid awake and in pain before the internet.

The avatar reminds themselves of the Midnight Movie about the woman in the car in fur, and the man in the bathtub.

A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN



Drums.

Having a digital body means you are never alone. An avatar describes using their digital body to learn things they didn’t learn in school. To distract themselves and to make new friends. With this body they do not let on that they are ill.

They have another digital body. It is in another name, and they control who follows them. This body goes to places that the first body is not designed to.

The avatar loves their digital bodies. They are never stuck in one place. They compare their digital bodies to that of the girl in the Los Angeles hotel fighting an invisible monster and the goddess in Delhi when the water collapsed.

If the person opened their computer right now the Midnight Movie of the man in the bathtub would still be playing.

BACK TO THE TAB -

TWO PLACES AT ONCE.

Illness is an invader. It feels like it must be coming from somewhere else but “the calls are coming from inside the house.” Illness is a scary hitchhiker that the avatar cannot get rid of.

BACK TO THE TAB -

THE WOMAN IN THE WATER TANK.



Drums.

Some people think the girl at the hotel in Los Angeles had a seizure disorder. Her family’s statement said that she had psychological problems. The lid of the tank was too heavy for her to have gotten in on her own. It is clear from the recording that she is fighting something.

NEW LINK -

PROBABLY A VIDEO.



Drums.

A representation of an ocean on stage. One of the avatars plays the drums, the other sits still on a chair. They are representing a real danger of drowning.

TOGGLE BACK TO TAB -

BLUE WHALE.

A girl goes online and meets something called a Blue Whale. For fifty days the girl will be asked to do one thing a day. Once you have agreed, there is no turning back. What you do becomes what you are. It starts with staying up to watch creepy videos in the middle of the night and gets more violent, more graphic. The avatar asks: What’s the difference between being dared out of your comfort zone, feeling like you’re on secret missions, and being forced to put yourself in danger again and again? Can it be both things at the same time?

A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN



Drums.

A game of truth or dare. The truth is they have not been out of their house since Sunday. The dare is to leave the house, to change their space, to change themselves.

SOME DISTANCE FROM THE SCREEN



Drums.

They are being urged to carry on. To get up, to have a bath, to drink the ocean dry.

NEW TAB -

AVATARS.

It is revealed that the actors are avatars for a person whose body cannot be trusted to tell this story every night. The performers can do things that the person cannot do, and be things that the person cannot be. The avatar says that although those of us with unreliable bodies might be more alive, more aware of the way things really are, they would rather be a reliable, optimised human being living a life that’s nothing but social media highlights.

The avatar was diagnosed at the age of six with 2D vision. They are neurologically incapable of seeing the difference between “real life” and a screen. The avatar wants to make it clear that this is not a metaphor. Their condition does not have a beginning, middle and end, but instead it is a midnight movie, with the music in the wrong place.

BACK TO TAB -

MIDNIGHT MOVIE.

The avatar is in a lot of pain. Morning is here and they are no closer to sleep. They remind us that every body is transient with a permanent digital reflection. The avatar is frustrated that whatever story they are searching for to distract them is not loading. The avatars do not know what to do. The computer is buffering. They try restarting it.

The woman kisses the man in his car. Her fingers go through his clothes and her lips are on his skin. He does not know what is happening. She unhinges her jaw and swallows him whole.

He asks a flood of questions.

The avatars destroy everything, and at the same are destroyed by everything.

NEW WINDOW -

JANELLE MONÁE.



Drums.

The avatar concludes that illness has swallowed them whole. It is the one driving the car. It is all there is.

The avatar asserts that the feeling that no, this is not true.

They sing “Make Me Feel” by Janelle Monae.

The avatar says that they went to a gig for the first time in a while. It was amazing, and the performer was amazing. But, they felt limited by the crowded, noisy place. They felt like their body was in completely the wrong place.

REBOOT

They felt like that place was completely wrong for their body.

REBOOT

That place made them feel like their body was wrong. But their body is the way it is, there is no right or wrong about it.

The avatar asks, how can you rebel when your body won’t stop rebelling? They imagine people standing in the pit, some sitting, and the rest wired to rigs in the sky. They imagine a street protest with everyone on stretchers, stopping traffic. They imagine a digital protest, filling the timeline with digital bodies.

They are there, at the protest. Except they’re not really there – they’re here.

**CURTAIN CALL**

**THE END.**