# Creator clarifies that public funds did not finance AI actress Tilly Norwood amid industry backlash



Eline Van Der Velden, a UK-based technologist, has created an AI-generated actress named Tilly Norwood, a digital entity that has ignited significant debate in Hollywood circles. At the heart of the controversy is a misconception that public money, specifically funding from the British Film Institute (BFI), was used to develop this AI talent. Van Der Velden has publicly clarified that no such public funds were allocated to the creation of Tilly Norwood.

The financial background behind Tilly Norwood is centred on two distinct entities managed by Van Der Velden. Particle6, a production company she runs, was awarded a £120,000 grant from the BFI UK Global Screen Fund in November 2023. However, this grant was designated solely for expanding Particle6's international reach—covering travel to overseas markets, conference attendance, acquisition of intellectual property, and hiring an international outreach lead. None of this funding was connected to AI talent projects. The AI actress was actually developed through Van Der Velden’s company Xicoia, established in February 2025, which launched Tilly Norwood publicly in July of the same year. According to Van Der Velden’s statement to Deadline, Xicoia’s funding was entirely from her personal investment, keeping its finances separate from Particle6 despite service agreements between the two. This distinction has been confirmed by a BFI spokesperson who reiterated that the grant awarded to Particle6 was not involved in the AI actress's development.

Despite this financial transparency, industry unrest persists around the ethical implications of AI-generated performers. Hollywood actors’ union SAG-AFTRA has voiced strong opposition to Tilly Norwood, condemning the technology for using computer-generated imagery trained on the work of countless human performers without their permission or remuneration. The union stresses that creativity should remain a human-driven endeavour and warns against risks such as the devaluation of human artistry and the potential displacement of actors by synthetic entities.

The backlash is not limited to unions; several prominent Hollywood figures, including Natasha Lyonne and Emily Blunt, have publicly criticised the AI project. Meanwhile, Van Der Velden defends Tilly Norwood as a form of art and creative expression rather than a replacement for human actors. She maintains that AI talent studios like Xicoia can operate responsibly and align with ethical guidelines, citing adherence to the BFI’s June 2025 report that outlines a framework for ethical AI usage in the screen sector.

Particle6, founded in 2015, continues to work in both traditional and AI-assisted television content production, with ongoing support from entities such as Channel 4 and Creative UK. Meanwhile, Xicoia plans to expand its roster of digital actors, positioning AI as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for human performers.

This episode highlights the complexity and sensitivity surrounding AI’s integration into the creative industries. It underscores the importance of clear communication regarding funding sources and ethical frameworks to mitigate fears about the misuse of public money and the broader impact on human creativity. Van Der Velden’s clarification and the BFI’s stance help to calm concerns by illustrating how AI talent studios can benefit from private investment while respecting public policy and industry standards.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/), [[4]](https://www.euronews.com/culture/2025/10/01/the-next-natalie-portman-meet-tilly-norwood-the-ai-actress-sparking-controversy)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/), [[7]](https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.indiatoday.in/entertainment/story/ai-actress-tilly-norwood-denounced-by-hollywood-sag-aftra-2795870-2025-09-30), [[6]](https://www.indiatoday.in/entertainment/story/ai-actress-tilly-norwood-denounced-by-hollywood-sag-aftra-2795870-2025-09-30)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film-tv/2025/10/01/ai-actress-tilly-norwood/), [[5]](https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film-tv/2025/10/01/ai-actress-tilly-norwood/), [[4]](https://www.euronews.com/culture/2025/10/01/the-next-natalie-portman-meet-tilly-norwood-the-ai-actress-sparking-controversy)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/), [[7]](https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.indiatoday.in/entertainment/story/ai-actress-tilly-norwood-denounced-by-hollywood-sag-aftra-2795870-2025-09-30> - SAG-AFTRA, the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, has denounced Tilly Norwood, the AI 'actress' created by Eline Van der Velden. The union opposes the replacement of human performers by synthetic entities, stating that Tilly Norwood is a character generated by a computer program trained on the work of countless professional performers without permission or compensation. The union emphasizes that creativity should remain human-centered and warns against the devaluation of human artistry.
3. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film-tv/2025/10/01/ai-actress-tilly-norwood/> - The National reports on the controversy surrounding Tilly Norwood, the AI-generated 'actress' created by Eline Van der Velden. The article highlights the backlash from Hollywood actors' union SAG-AFTRA, which opposes the replacement of human performers by synthetic entities. The piece also mentions reactions from Hollywood stars like Natasha Lyonne and Emily Blunt, who have criticized the project, and includes a statement from Van der Velden defending her creation as a piece of art and not a replacement for human actors.
4. <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2025/10/01/the-next-natalie-portman-meet-tilly-norwood-the-ai-actress-sparking-controversy> - Euronews introduces Tilly Norwood, the AI 'actress' created by Eline Van der Velden, and discusses the controversy it has sparked in the film industry. The article covers the interest from talent agents in representing Norwood, the reactions from Hollywood stars and unions opposing the use of AI in replacing human performers, and Van der Velden's defense of her creation as a form of art and a tool for creative expression rather than a replacement for human actors.
5. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film-tv/2025/10/01/ai-actress-tilly-norwood/> - The National reports on the controversy surrounding Tilly Norwood, the AI-generated 'actress' created by Eline Van der Velden. The article highlights the backlash from Hollywood actors' union SAG-AFTRA, which opposes the replacement of human performers by synthetic entities. The piece also mentions reactions from Hollywood stars like Natasha Lyonne and Emily Blunt, who have criticized the project, and includes a statement from Van der Velden defending her creation as a piece of art and not a replacement for human actors.
6. <https://www.indiatoday.in/entertainment/story/ai-actress-tilly-norwood-denounced-by-hollywood-sag-aftra-2795870-2025-09-30> - SAG-AFTRA, the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, has denounced Tilly Norwood, the AI 'actress' created by Eline Van der Velden. The union opposes the replacement of human performers by synthetic entities, stating that Tilly Norwood is a character generated by a computer program trained on the work of countless professional performers without permission or compensation. The union emphasizes that creativity should remain human-centered and warns against the devaluation of human artistry.
7. <https://www.themovieblog.com/2025/10/creator-says-no-bfi-money-fueled-ai-actress-tilly-norwood/> - The Movie Blog reports on Eline Van der Velden's clarification regarding the funding of Tilly Norwood, the AI 'actress' she created. Van der Velden states that the development of Tilly Norwood was funded through her own company, Xicoia, and not with any grant money from the British Film Institute (BFI). She explains that the £120,000 grant received by her other company, Particle6, from the BFI UK Global Screen Fund in November 2023 was intended to grow the company's international reach and was separate from any AI talent work.