

REALITIES

a new musical by Charles Gilbert and Steve Hochman
Revised treatment

Realities invites the audience to enter the world of Alex Inman, computer virtuoso and designer of “virtual realities,” a form of digital technology which enables an individual to enter and interact with computer-generated illusions. The VR experience surrounds the user with video or holographic images via goggles that cover the eyes and computer generated sounds, and a “data glove” is used to enable the user to touch and manipulate imaginary objects and navigate the terrain of this “silicon mirage.” In Alex’s world, imagination and technology combine to create a universe of unlimited possibilities.

For Alex, confined to a wheelchair as a result of a recent crippling auto accident, virtual reality is more than an intriguing experiment. It is his means of escaping the pain and physical limitations of his condition into an idealized world where his vision and values can prevail. Realities narrates the events of several crucial days in the life of this tormented genius, when forces converge to shake his solitary world to its computerized core.

I.1. Late one night, Cybil, an exotic looking cyber-chick, invites a guest to the remote warehouse studio where she works to experience some of her boss’s virtual reality (VR) creations (“What A Trip”). The guest, Karney is a small-time entrepreneur who boasts of connections with the media industry. Unbeknownst to the two of them, Alex Inman, virtual reality virtuoso and Cybil’s employer, is observing his assistant and her visitor through a security video camera, irritated by the fact that Cybil has brought this “pick-up” back to the lab. Karney’s initial enthusiasm for Alex’s “automated fantasy machine” changes to panic as Alex switches VR programs and causes Karney to experience a distressingly life-like car crash experience.

Alex introduces himself to Karney through an onscreen avatar (“Virtually Perfect”), and is uncooperative when Karney tries to talk business with him.

I.2. Anna, a physical therapist who has recently been hired to work with Alex, reviews his case with Doctor Godfrey, seeking advice from Alex’s eccentric physician about her new client’s challenging, enigmatic personality (“The Man’s A Riddle”). Meanwhile, back in Alex’s computer studio, his cyberpunk assistants, Cybil and Arff, vent their frustrations about their intractable mentor in a continuation of the same song.

I.3. The next morning, Alex and Cybil bicker about Karney’s visit and the lab’s precarious finances: “If we don’t find someone with the bucks to take us to the big time,” warns Cybil, “we’re headed for a dead end on the information superhighway.” Their quarrel is interrupted by the arrival of Anna. Attractive, upbeat, common-sensical and persuasive, Anna tries to convince Alex that he needs to spend less time and energy on his computer and more on his physical and emotional rehabilitation. (“Getting Stronger Every Day”) As she sings, she tries to get Alex to walk, but Alex resists her positive encouragement with practiced indifference. She questions the necessity of Alex’s virtual reality experiments, but is surprised to find herself admiring his courage and vision as he sings about the true purpose of his work with idealistic fervor (“Change The World”).

I.4. Cybil arranges a meeting for Alex with some important potential backers. Knowing Alex will resist the idea of a car trip away from his Workshop, she enlists Anna's support to get him to the club where the meeting will take place.

I.5. Anna proposes an evening out together (Alex's first outing since his accident), convinced that it will do Alex good to get out of the house and back into circulation. She tells Alex that, encouraged by Cybil and Arff, she has planned a visit to "The Cutting Edge," a nightspot in the nearby city, to see one of their favorite entertainers, Miles Rushmore. Anna is astonished to learn Rushmore was Alex's roommate in college, and baffled by Alex's apparent reluctance to see his former friend. Ultimately, he yields to her enthusiasm and agrees to the outing.

Anna goes and Alex, in his private thoughts, reflects on how he is coming to care for his new companion ("Strange Data"). Alex is surprised by his eagerness to please his new therapist, feelings which take precedence over the fear and reluctance he would ordinarily feel. He tries to suppress these thoughts, aware of how impossible it would be for her to have reciprocal feelings for a man in his hopeless condition.

Alex's gloomy reverie is interrupted by the sound of the computer-synthesized voice of ALICE, the "Artificial Linguistic Interactive Computing Environment" he has designed which enables him to give spoken commands to his computer. ALICE sings Alex a siren song of the perfect world that awaits him if he'll only join her "Behind The Screen." As the song unfolds, ALICE is joined by a chorus of "microchips" who sing and dance in bewitching binary patterns while Alex floats from his chair and soars through a magical virtual environment.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Alex's house, Anna is in the midst of a vigorous physical workout. As she exercises, she sings of her confused feelings about her newest patient ("Work It Out"). Her new patient is a tough challenge, but Anna loves a challenge, and is drawn to this brilliant though cantankerous man. Beneath his moody stubbornness, she can see his brilliance and his sensitive spirit, and she dedicates herself to helping Alex to heal.

I.6. Cybil and Arfff at work in the Workshop. Cybil is concerned that Alex finds Anna a distraction from their work. She thinks he could have all the relationships he wants online - just like she does. She confides in Arff that she enjoys tremendous freedom from the different identities she can assume online ("Multiple Windows").

I.7. In the car on their way to "The Cutting Edge," Anna tries to get Alex to talk about Miles, but Alex is too distracted by his own anxieties (triggered by memories of his accident) to carry on a conversation ("We're Never Gonna Make It"). In a private reverie, he reminisces about the history of his relationship with Miles. Anna's efforts to get Alex to speak of his feelings are thwarted by their abrupt arrival at their destination.

I.8. The song "The Cutting Edge" introduces us to the denizens of this "outpost of the avant-garde," with nightlife columnist Maeve LaMotta serving as our tour guide to the foibles of the would-be cognoscenti who congregate there. Alex and Anna arrive in the midst of Miles's performance, which appears ingenious and slightly puzzling, combining funky jazz and digitally sampled sounds with a ferocious, Lenny Bruce-style wit in a way which is greeted enthusiastically by the crowd.

After the performance, Miles and Alex are re-united for the first time since Alex's accident. Miles meets and is charmed by Anna. Cybil and Karney take Alex to meet the "suits," backers from BL Enterprises who are dismayed by Alex's handicap when they first meet him.

Alex charms them and allays their fears. In the song “Wheelman”, Alex tells Miles and the entertainment executives about the advantages of life in a wheelchair; he conceals his customary bitterness behind a tone of upbeat bravado, and the patrons of “The Edge” are won over.

Suddenly, however, a club patron who was insulted during Miles’s performance appears with a gun, ready to avenge his humiliation. Alex, in a futile display of wheelchair machismo, tries to come to Miles’s defense, but is knocked from his chair in the free-for-all. Miles and Anna retreat to the car with a shaken and rueful Alex.

I.9. Back at Alex’s house, Miles and Alex become reacquainted as Alex gives Miles a tour of his studio and some of his work. The scene opens with Miles experimenting with an “air guitar” Alex has designed, one which uses a data glove as a controller. Miles is fascinated by Alex’s hardware, but he has an even greater interest in Alex’s attractive companion, Anna. Both Anna and Miles are aware that Alex seems moody and withdrawn (and, to Anna, inexplicably hostile). Miles is dismayed, and, in “What Happened To The Song?”, he expresses his concern about how much Alex has changed since their student days. During the song, he accompanies himself on Alex’s “air guitar,” and Anna is inspired to improvise a dance to Miles’s music.

Miles, in a flash of inspired opportunism, offers Alex the chance to design visual imagery for his upcoming music-performance-artwork, a live multi-media show and interactive CD-ROM entitled “The Emperor’s Digital Tuxedo.” He presents the opportunity to Alex as a big break, a chance for Alex to hitch his wagon (or wheelchair) to Miles’s rising star. Miles also proposes to incorporate Anna as a dancer in his new live show, a prospect that captivates her. Dubious about Miles’s intentions and his abilities to deliver the promised opportunity, Alex retires for the evening, and Miles is quick to capitalize on his absence to fan the flame of Anna’s growing interest. In the concluding quartet of Act I (“Aflame”), Miles attempts a seduction of Anna as an unhappy Alex entreats ALICE, his computer creation, to tell him what to do now.

II.1. The second act of Realities opens early the following morning. In virtual reality, Alex is playing out a computer-generated simulation of the previous night’s events. In his VR fantasy, Alex vanquishes his perceived foes - Miles, his assailant at “The Edge,” and the executives - with a superhero’s skill.

II.2. Meanwhile, back in actual reality, Anna and Miles reflect on their actions of the night before (“What Have I Gotten Myself Into?”), eventually joined by Alex in a trio. Alex tries to come to grips with the growing intensity of his feelings towards Anna and the prospect of losing her to Miles.

II.3. Doctor Godfrey, Alex’s physician, conducts a physical examination and marvels at the abuses that Alex has inflicted on himself the night before (“It’s A Wonder That A Body Survives”). He cautions Alex to be more realistic in his behavior and his expectations.

II.4. Alex and his assistant, Arff, are immersed in preparations for a demo presentation for the entertainment executives they met at The Edge. Alex instructs his assistant to assemble footage from Alex’s previous creations. He is distracted from the task at hand, however, by thoughts of Anna, and uses Arff (on whose silence he thinks he can rely) for a sounding board as he tries to sort out his ideas. Alex and Arff turn to ALICE to help them understand the female mind, but the computer dismisses all women as hopelessly illogical. In the song “Fuzzy Logic” (not on tape), ALICE tries to convince Alex that the virtual world can provide him with all the

companionship he needs. ALICE appears as a computer-simulated “virtual woman” who looks and sounds like Anna but whose eerie manner Alex finds more disturbing than alluring.

II.5. Karney and Miles have persuaded the media executives to visit Alex’s lab for a demonstration, accompanied by columnist Maeve LaMotta. Miles introduces a hurriedly-concocted collaboration, “Double Yellow Line.” During their performance, Alex surprises Miles by taking him into the same virtual reality program that caused Karney to react with panic and fear at the beginning of the play. Miles, panicked at first by the disturbingly life-like simulation of a car traveling at high speeds and spinning out of control, becomes angry when he recognizes the program as Alex’s virtual re-enactment of the accident that crippled him. (Perhaps Alex is hoping that his program’s verisimilitude will force Miles to confess the fact that he was at the wheel at the time of the accident.)

The presence of the executives, however, prevents Miles from overtly confronting Alex about his malicious stunt. Their guests are enthusiastic about the collaboration, and receive Alex’s work warmly. They see great financial potential in Alex’s genius for creating virtual worlds, and press Alex to make some modifications which will adapt his work according to their notion of what is marketable. Alex becomes indignant, and sings an impassioned reprise of “Change The World,” after which he withdraws to his studio, bringing the soiree to an abrupt end. Miles is exasperated by Alex’s obstinate behavior and makes apologies to the guests. Once they have gone, Miles encourages Anna to come away with him for the night. She is concerned for Alex, but Alex does not respond to her knock and she decides to go with Miles. Alex watches the two of them leave together on his security video monitor.

II.6. In a double duet (“Hard Drive” - not on tape), Anna and Miles are seen in Anna’s car, looking for a hotel room, while Alex is seen with ALICE, struggling with the difficult choice of whether to escape “behind the screen” or to venture once more into the real world he fears to pursue Anna. Miles entreats Anna passionately to forget Alex and come with him, and his increasingly physical advances cause their car to veer out of control. ALICE tries, with equal intensity, to lure Alex back into her world. Alex finally makes his decision and turns a deaf ear to ALICE’s entreaties. The computer crashes, just as Miles and Anna’s car skids off the road and crashes as well.

II.7. In a final scene, Alex and Anna come together at the hospital after the accident. Alex finds the courage to confess to Anna how much he cares for her. Anna, moved by the extraordinary effort she knows it must have taken for Alex to come to her at the hospital, responds in kind, quelling Alex’s fears that she could never care for a man in his condition. (“Change The World” reprise - not on tape). Accepting the fact that Alex will probably never walk again, they take their first precarious steps toward a meaningful intimate relationship. After the Doctor goes, Cybil comes to confront Anna and accuse him of distracting Alex. Each one claims she knows what’s best for him, and they argue in a dueling duet (“Step Back, Sister”). II.3II.4to The Cutting Edgell.5en route to The Edge (“I Have To Stand”) Alex calls for Arff to help him get to Anna at The Cutting Edge.II.6Back at The Edge, Miles is onstage (“Smash and Grab”). In the audience, Cybil is at the club trying to make a deal with Karney and the suits which would cut Alex out of the picture. Alex arrives, to everyone’s surprise, and interrupts Miles’s performance. He confronts Miles and tells him he won’t let Anna be taken from him. He confesses his feelings to Anna (“Here I Stand”).

Arff speaks to Cybil for the first time; he is angry that she would betray their benefactor. Alex confronts them and gets them to agree to his terms: their backing but he retains creative control. Anna gets Alex to agree to her terms: a better balance between VR and RL. , rejoicing in the potential for exciting new things ahead. ("Getting Stronger Every Day (reprise)"). ,despite Cybil's entreaties, henna, Miles and the suits from BL but has a hard time planning how to handle the real situation. Meanwhile, Anna and Miles awaken and reflect upon the complications that may ensue from last night's encounter.

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