

GLARE

Opera

by

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Libretto

by

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Characters:

LEA, a young woman	Soprano
ALEX, a man in his prime	Tenor
CHRISTINA, Alex's ex-girlfriend	Mezzo
MICHAEL, Alex's older-brother-like friend	Baritone

Instrumental Ensemble (11 instruments) and Electronics

Overview:

A psycho-drama chamber-play with science-fiction elements focussing on the relationships between four protagonists: As doubts surface whether one of them is an artificial human, the piece debates reality and its perception, the authenticity of experience and emotion. It asks what is real and how we can really know who we are ourselves.

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Scene One

A beautiful morning.

ALEX Ridiculous.
 I can't wait!
 I must see her,
 I can't wait anymore.

 When you are alone,
 time always feels too long.
 I have waited too long,
 far too long...

 Lea and I,
 the two of us,
 just –
 two of us!

ALEX remembers what LEA said at their first meeting:

LEA *offstage*: Your hand
 is strong...

ALEX *replies*: What catches my eye...
 I hold on tight.

ALEX No giggle,
 no stutter.
 She looked me straight in the eye -
 so confident
 fearless
 only beautiful clarity.

 Soon again
 I'll see
 her flying steps,
 soon again
 here with me
 that dizzy lightness of heart,
 soon again!

ALEX *suddenly*: Unless - she doesn't -
 Is she late?
 Is she still -...?

ALEX remembers again their first meeting, like an echo:

LEA *offstage*: Your hand
 is strong...
ALEX What catches my eye...
 I hold on tight.

LEA comes along, waving: Alex!

LEA and ALEX run towards each other and kiss.

ALEX *excited*: Perfect!
 Perfect - you, the day.

LEA *with a smile*: Perfect is the least you should expect.

ALEX thinking, then smiling: That's right! You're right!

ALEX Let's go!

Scene Two

Later.

ALEX Is it the first time for you too?
 You never felt this before?

LEA Never. I never felt this.

ALEX Why is that?
 What makes it so special?

LEA It's because we like the same things.

ALEX What makes it so good?

LEA It's because we think alike.

ALEX Is it your beauty? Your touch?
 Your lips?
 Your eyes?

LEA It's because we like the same things.

ALEX ... we like the same things.

ALEX *grins and grabs* LEA: Oh yes! I love it, when you -
love it, that you - love it like I do.

LEA You and I,
the two of us...

ALEX We like it the same way!
LEA & ALEX The two of us.

LEA Let's do it again.

ALEX Let's do it all over again!

LEA Perfect!

ALEX *happens to look at his watch.*

ALEX We must go!

LEA Let's do it again...

ALEX Not now. Soon!

ALEX *takes LEA and runs offstage with her.*

Scene Three

A gallery opening. Party atmosphere. Sticky. Crowded.

ALEX *to* LEA: Loud! The music.

LEA *nods*: Just over seventy decibels.

ALEX *surprised, confused, then amused*: Do you want a drink?

LEA *softly*: I want to stay close to you.

ALEX *takes LEA's arm, they wonder around.*

LEA Do you like the paintings?

ALEX *suddenly*: Oh no!

LEA What's up?

ALEX My ex!

LEA So -?

ALEX She saw me.

LEA *smiles*: So we say: Hello?

ALEX takes LEA's arm and they approach CHRISTINA. ALEX is visibly nervous, but happy that LEA takes it so easy.

ALEX Christina – this is Lea.

LEA It's a pleasure, Christina!

CHRISTINA *observant, but friendly*: Lea – hello.

CHRISTINA *and LEA shake hands*.

LEA *genuinely*: So elegant...
 your fingers,
 delicate.
 You play music?

CHRISTINA *amused, but also flattered*: No. I am an artist!

LEA Gorgeous!

CHRISTINA Only as a hobby...

LEA Drawing? Etching? Oil?

ALEX *sharply*: Pencil. And a lot of rubber.

LEA *to CHRISTINA*: Do you like the party?

CHRISTINA Do you?
looking around: It's hot in here...

LEA *promptly*: Just over thirty degrees.

CHRISTINA looks at LEA, surprised. ALEX startles when he hears LEA repeating herself.

ALEX watches CHRISTINA and LEA, obviously uneasy.

ALEX *to LEA*: Do you want to go somewhere else?

CHRISTINA *promptly*: I don't like parties!

sarcastically: Vernissages.
Only hot air...
just hot air!

LEA I know!

CHRISTINA But what about an ice-cold swim in the dark?

LEA Perfect.

CHRISTINA Yes.

LEA So refreshing!

CHRISTINA Just perfect.

LEA *smiling:* Perfect is the least you should expect.

CHRISTINA That's right! You are right.

ALEX Lea! Lea, let's go!
The air. I'm not feeling...
Let's go!

LEA *instantly obedient, nods at ALEX, tries to calm down his aggression.*

LEA Christina - soon again...
Soon!

CHRISTINA See you soon!

LEA *and ALEX go off, CHRISTINA looks after them.*

CHRISTINA Her eyes are beautiful.
Moss-green with a spark inside.
Cat eyes...

ALEX *to LEA as they go out:* Watch out!
She always does that, Christina.
She leads you on
and lets you fall.

LEA *half asking:* She seemed sincere...

ALEX She leads you on
and lets you fall.
Trust me!

LEA But I do, Alex!
I trust you

puts her hand on ALEX 's cheek: with all my heart.

ALEX *suspiciously:* With all your heart?
Really?

LEA With all my heart.

ALEX *pushes her away suddenly:* Sorry, it's hot...I'm...

LEA What's wrong?

ALEX Nothing, really... It's nothing!

LEA Do you want to -

ALEX No, let's go!

LEA Of course, if you -

ALEX Let's just go!

ALEX *and LEA leave the gallery opening.*

Scene Four

Later. Outside.

ALEX and LEA sit, she holds his hand.

LEA Your hand...

ALEX *suddenly grabs her hand and holds it up:* And yours?
Mine's strong...
hers elegant...
and yours?

LEA *puts her hand gently on his face:* It fits exactly on your cheek.

ALEX *feels the touch, then pulls back abruptly:* Do that again!

LEA *repeats the same movement:* It fits exactly on your cheek.

ALEX And again! Repetition!
Perfect Repetition!

ALEX *jumps up furiously, LEA does not understand.*

LEA Don't we all repeat what we like?
 Don't we all repeat what is good?
 Over, over and over again
 if it's perfect...
 Don't we want to do it again
 and again?

ALEX excited, but clearly still in his suspicion: Let's do it again!

ALEX & LEA Let's do it again!
 All over again -

ALEX looks at LEA, pale.

LEA Are you cold?
 You're shaking.

ALEX No... I... must go!

ALEX rushes off.

LEA looking after him: Soon again!
 You said and waved
 that morning
 when we first said good-bye.

LEA alone, looking around as if she didn't know what to do, then suddenly composed.

LEA to herself: Over and over again...
 Don't we all repeat what we like?

Scene Five

A pub.

MICHAEL sits at the bar. ALEX rushes in.

MICHAEL Alex! You are white as a sheet.

ALEX confused: Lea, she -

MICHAEL Who?

ALEX Lea. My girlfriend.

MICHAEL You have a girlfriend? Since when?

ALEX Two weeks, four days.

MICHAEL And you haven't told me!

ALEX You saw her.

ALEX *points at a table near the bar:* I met her here in the pub that night when you left early.

MICHAEL And you took advantage of that... I see. Which one?

ALEX She's young.

MICHAEL Of course...

ALEX Red dress.

MICHAEL *remembers:* The hottie!

ALEX *proud:* Not hot, on fire!

MICHAEL What's the problem then?
Alex! What's the problem?

ALEX I don't know if she -

MICHAEL Yes?

ALEX ...if she really is... what...
who I think she is.

MICHAEL You have known for two weeks!

ALEX It's just that... I mean, she -
She loves me...Lea.
It's not like - that's not the problem...
It's just that she - or I... she...

MICHAEL Alex, for god's sake, it's only a woman!

ALEX Only?! I wish I were like you...

MICHAEL *patronizing:* I am a scientist.
I don't feel. I think.
I see the things the way they are,
not how I want them to be.
Facts and matter, matter and facts!

My friend, what is the matter?

ALEX
The way she talks,
I hear always the same patterns.
The way she moves,
I see always the same patterns.
Even when she caresses me,
always the same,
her smile, her laugh!
Always the same!

MICHAEL
What else?

ALEX
remembering:
Her ears! Too good to be true.
“Just over seventy decibels”...
Ears like meters, like instruments.

MICHAEL *overly dramatic:* Is she a super-woman?
Or an alien?

ALEX
Michael, I’m serious! Please!

MICHAEL *suddenly serious, respectful:* Absolutely.
I’m impressed.

ALEX
What?

MICHAEL *in his own thoughts:* Nothing...
to ALEX: Go on!
Tell me more about your Lea.

ALEX
Moves, phrases,
she copies everything!
As if she were recording me...
Remembers everything.
I know how she’ll move,
I know what she’ll say,
yet I do not know
who she is...
remembering: there... smiling at me.

MICHAEL *serious:* Do you like her smell?
I mean it! Do you like it?
Even after you two...

ALEX *pale, nervous:* Yes, I like it.
I love her smell after we made – ...
What’s your point?

MICHAEL *smiling:* Her glands were really hard to make.

The glands of your L-E-A!
spelling it out: L-L-Learning! E-E-Exposed! A-A-Android!
LEA!
Designed to please you.

ALEX Come on!

MICHAEL *with a courtly gesture:* You're welcome.

ALEX *beginning to believe Michael, but still fighting it:* You're not funny!

MICHAEL I know!
smiling: I brought her here that night.
Sorry, I set you up!
Your LEA is a product of our institute.
I thought you'd like her.

ALEX I do.

MICHAEL I know.
juicily: Enjoy her.
As she enjoys you too.

MICHAEL *enthusiastically:* You bring her to life,
her world is defined by you.
She'll feel what you feel,
see what you see.
You'll build a life together!
She will follow you,
be there for you,
love you.

ALEX *mostly to himself:* Androids don't look...

MICHAEL LEA! Designed to please you.

ALEX *crying out:* Androids don't look that real!

MICHAEL They didn't
in the past.
derogatively: Plastic!
We've come a long, long way.
We use hormones, we use enzymes, we use proteins.
We use cells that reproduce like ours!
Her heartbeat's real, her body's alive,
she's real!
Better than real!
secretively: She will never betray you or hurt you or disappoint
you or play with your feelings as real women do.

ALEX Why's that?

MICHAEL Because she's yours.
You activated her
when you looked into her eyes.
When she was made,
her mind was like a blank sheet.
Preinstalled, but empty like a blank sheet.
She becomes human by copying you!
sweetly: She needs you.
patronizing: Science, my friend!

Enjoy her!
As she enjoys you too.
The freedom you have!
You're giving your LEA her soul...

ALEX and MICHAEL *simultaneously*:

MICHAEL You show her the world, and your world will be hers.
You'll build a life together.
You turned her on when you looked into her eyes.
She's yours, all yours.
She will follow you, protect you, love you.

ALEX I give Lea her soul...
my world will be hers.
We'll build a life together!
Her eyes are beautiful...
She will follow me, protect me, love me.

ALEX *suddenly, as if waking up*: Michael! You're making fun of me.
This is not... can't be true.

MICHAEL *casually*: If you say so.

ALEX *more aggressively*: Prove it to me!

MICHAEL You want a proof?
looks around, half to himself: Proof that she was designed for you?

MICHAEL *draws closer to ALEX, secretively*: Ask her to cut you.
Tell her to cut you with a knife!
She won't be able to.

ALEX I hope not!

MICHAEL She can't.
You are her human.
You are her life!

grins: She would never hurt you.

ominously: Scare her,
pressure her,
threaten her!

Go on:

tenderly: Say you need proof of her love!
She won't be able to hurt you.
Science, my friend!

ALEX *appalled:* The way you talk about her...

MICHAEL That's the beauty of her!
She's more faithful, devoted,
more human than we'll ever be,
than anyone you'll ever know!
But Alex – *puts his fingers on his lips to indicate that ALEX
should keep all this to himself.*

MICHAEL *then pats ALEX on the back and leaves.*

ALEX *confused:* Lea!
Lea - a machine?
Impossible...
remembering: Let's do it... again!
But what if -
Confusion!
Human? Inhuman?
Clarity! Reason! Humanity!
Lea! Designed to please?
Human or machine?
Humachine!
Humonstrosity!
Oh God! My head...

Scene Six

ALEX *alone.* LEA *comes along.*

LEA *tenderly:* Alex, my love.

ALEX Lea, wait! Hang on.
How loud now - my voice?

LEA *smiling:* Almost sixty decibels.

ALEX *trembles, steps back.*

LEA Are you alright?

ALEX Why do you ask?

LEA Because it's loud for lovers' talk.

ALEX *suspiciously:* How would you know?

LEA *still tenderly:* I want you to be happy.

ALEX What do you want?
Let me look into your eyes again.

LEA *takes his hand and puts it on her face:* Your hand
is strong...

ALEX *falling for her again:* What catches my eye...
I hold on tight.

ALEX *pushes LEA away:* Give me time. Le – *not finishing her name.*
Please, just give me time.
I just -
give me time!

LEA Time?
For what?

ALEX *runs away, LEA is looking after him.*

LEA Why are you running away from me?
Why do you run, Alex?
Where are we now?
a little too repetitive, mechanical: What can I do?
Tell me, what can I do?
What have I done?!

LEA *repeating her last conversation with ALEX exactly as it took place:*

LEA Alex, my love!
Almost sixty decibels...
Are you alright?
It's loud for lovers' talk.
I want you to be happy!
Your hand is strong...
Why are you running away from me?!
Where do we go, tell me, where do we go?
What can we do?
Where are we now?

Scene Seven

The same place, CHRISTINA comes along.

CHRISTINA Lea! What a wonderful - *playful*: coincidence.

LEA It's a pleasure, Christina. How are you?

CHRISTINA *returns the question*: No - how are you?

LEA *looks as if she does not understand*.

CHRISTINA How are things going with Alex?

LEA Fine...

CHRISTINA Are you sure?
more and more agitated: Is he good to you?
Don't let him destroy your good nature!
tenderly: Don't let him change you.
Don't let him hurt you.
Stay the way you are.

Scene Eight

Night. ALEX alone in his bedroom.

ALEX Lea, do you dream at night?
Machines have no dreams... Or have they?
And androids?
with contempt: Learning Exposed An-
What about you, Lea?
Do you dream at night?
What do you see
in your dreams,
me? Us?
When we last made -
covers his eyes: A nightmare!

Where do you go, when I'm not there?
What do you do, when I'm not there?

Do you have nightmares,
wake up
soaked in sweat?
Screaming in the dark?
Are you afraid,
ever scared to death?

Where do you go, when I'm not there?
What do you do, when I'm not there?
Do you think?
Turn yourself off?
And I turn you on?
Lea!
Are you there when I'm not there?

Scene Nine

Daytime. Out on the street.

CHRISTINA Where is Lea?

ALEX Why do you ask?

CHRISTINA *sceptically*: She trusts you...

ALEX What do you know about trust?!

CHRISTINA He who trusts may be betrayed.

ALEX *suddenly*: Should I watch out? Be on my guard?
Be more aware?

CHRISTINA Don't change her! Don't hurt her!

ALEX *half in thought*: What if she can't be hurt?
What if it's not possible?

CHRISTINA *furiously*: That's what you want?
To hurt her? You're dangerous!
Stay away from me! From everyone! *storms off.*

Scene Ten

The same pub as in Scene Five.

MICHAEL Christie! There you are.

CHRISTINA Michael. That time is over
when people called me 'Christie'.

MICHAEL You mean when Alex...

CHRISTINA Over!

MICHAEL I know. I'm sorry.

CHRISTINA Really?

MICHAEL He is my friend!
Alex was a wreck when you left him.
You are -

CHRISTINA *interrupting*: Michael, what do you want?

MICHAEL To know... *flirtatious*: to feel
that all is well
touches her: with you... too.

CHRISTINA *steps back*: I'm fine. Thanks.

MICHAEL Really? You seem nervous, and cold,
disappointed, protecting yourself from the next disappoint-

CHRISTINA *interrupting*: No! There is no danger.

MICHAEL *draws closer again*: What's the problem then?
Christie! You come here on a Wednesday,
here, where you and I and Alex used to...

CHRISTINA *slaps MICHAEL*: What's your problem, Michael?

MICHAEL *stunned*: That's why he could not stand it with you!

CHRISTINA That time is over! *goes off*.

MICHAEL *to himself*: He needs something... else...
turns around, obviously looking for somebody.

(QUARTET)

LEA and ALEX show in the background. They have just been kissing. ALEX draws back, looking confused. All four sing together and each for themselves in different places.

LEA Alex, where are you?
 Must see you. Can't wait.
 What about us?

CHRISTINA Lea, where are you?
 Where are you now?
 Must see you. Can't wait.

ALEX Lea, where are you?
 Where are you now?
 Must see you. Must see clear.
 Can't wait!
 What is happening with us?

MICHAEL Lea, where are you?
 Must see you. Can't wait.

(end of QUARTET)

MICHAEL approaches LEA. His walk suggests that he is rather drunk.

MICHAEL Hi, beauty. There you are.
 Perfect! How are you?

LEA Do I know you?

MICHAEL Not really. But I know you.

LEA How is that?

MICHAEL Come here!
 I'm a scientist.
 I design mirrors of people like you.

LEA That's interesting.

MICHAEL Every mirror is made with a special purpose.
 Do you know yours?

LEA Do I know what?

MICHAEL Your purpose?

Your eyes are beautiful.
Moss-green with a spark inside.

CHRISTINA *kisses* LEA. *At first, LEA lets it happen, then pulls back.*

LEA I'm not made for this.

CHRISTINA Is it the first time for you too?
Not kissed a woman before?

LEA Never. I haven't.

CHRISTINA Neither have I...

CHRISTINA *thinks about what she just said, then kisses* LEA *again.*

LEA *draws back, more firmly:* I love him!

CHRISTINA Why?
Why, Lea?

LEA *remembering:* Alex and I, the two of us...

CHRISTINA I hope you know what you're doing, Lea!

CHRISTINA *goes off.*

Scene Eleven

Transition to ALEX's place: At the beginning of this scene, we see LEA in the same spot as before. Throughout her aria, the setting changes so that by the end of her aria we see LEA in ALEX's home.

LEA *as if still answering Christina, who has left:* I don't know
if I know what I'm doing
I don't know...
From the first moment
he looked into my eyes
I felt it.
I don't know why,
but I know that I love him.
I may not know what I'm doing
but something in me knows what to do
and I know that this something
is called "love".

His eyes are beautiful.
I know that - *to* ALEX: I love you.

ALEX *repeating his previous question, now suspiciously*: Is it the first time for you ever?
You never felt this before?

LEA Never.

ALEX Why is that?
Why? Lea!
Why do you love me?

LEA Why do you ask me that, too?

ALEX Who else asked you?

LEA Christina. Don't ask!

ALEX *confused*: Why not? Do you like her?

LEA You warned me: She leads you on
and let's you fall...

ALEX *aggressively*: Don't just repeat what I said!
I want the truth!

LEA *scared, tenderly*: There is nothing to worry about.

ALEX Do you even know?
What he did to you?
Michael -

LEA *shivers*: You know?

ALEX I know!

LEA I want to forget!

ALEX *surprised*: So you know!?

LEA How could I not know? He raped me!
Thank God, Christina was there.

ALEX *in shock, holding his head*: This is a nightmare.
I don't understand.
Where? When?
This is a nightmare -
I want to wake up!

LEA It's not a dream,
 this is reality.

ALEX *angrily*: How would you know what is real, what is human?

LEA Of course I know.

ALEX What proves that you are real?

LEA Of course I am -

ALEX *interrupting*: What proves it to me, to you?!

LEA *looks around*: I see this world.
 I see your face.
 I see you, *drawing closer*: I feel your hot breath
 and when you're afraid, I feel your fear, and then -
 I'm afraid too.

ALEX *pulls back*: Of course you are!
 Learning – Exposed - Android!

LEA *tenderly*: Trust me
 and we'll build a life together.

ALEX At what price?
 I turned you on when I looked into your eyes!
 I cannot forget.
 We cannot live as if you were like me,
 it's too late, there is no way back,
 I can't forget,
 can't love -

LEA I'm a woman, you're a man!
 I will follow you, protect you, love -

ALEX *suddenly cold*: You didn't choose me.
 It's not real.

LEA Did you choose me?
 Or did it just happen to you?
 tenderly: We don't know why
 but something in us knows
 what to do.

ALEX *in a sudden impulse*: Prove it!
 Prove that you love me!
 takes out a kitchen knife: Cut me! With this knife!

LEA Why hurt you?

ALEX Prove your free will!
Cut me! With this knife!
It's the only way.

LEA Love needs trust.
Trust me.
Like I trust you - *puts her hand on ALEX's cheek*: With all my
heart.

ALEX With all your heart?

LEA With all my...

ALEX shouting – trying to force LEA to take the knife: Then trust me and cut me!

LEA I can't.

ALEX You will.

LEA I won't.

ALEX You must. Now cut me!

LEA No reason. I love you.

ALEX You are programmed this way!
increasingly aggressive, forcing the knife into her hand: You will. You must.
You have to - now cut me!

LEA You are scaring me.
I won't. I can't. I love you!

ALEX and LEA fight over the knife.

LEA Your are hurting me!

ALEX You are a machine!
Cut! Me! Please!

LEA I can't.
Please!

*ALEX accidentally stabs her with the knife when Lea makes a sudden movement to
free herself. LEA falls down on the floor. Blood is squirting out of the wound.
ALEX bends over her, terrified, looks into her eyes.*

ALEX Lea... Gone.

Scene Twelve

Bright daylight.

ALEX *in a desolate state as MICHAEL appears.*

MICHAEL, *uneasy, not knowing if ALEX knows about the assault but hiding it well:*
You're alone? Where is Lea?

ALEX
Gone... Forever.
I'm sorry! I didn't -
I probably...
desperately: Get me a new one!

MICHAEL *shaking his head:* They're all the same. Women. All the same...

ALEX *crying:* I broke her! She'll not come back!
Build me a new one.

MICHAEL
Calm down...

ALEX
Build me a new Lea!

MICHAEL
You mean an android?

Painfully long silence.

MICHAEL *grins:* In twenty years perhaps?
Or even sooner, who knows...

ALEX *panicking:* You made her!
Make me a new Lea, please!

MICHAEL *still smiling:* You'll get what you wish for.
Some day it will be possible.
We are almost there.

ALEX *desperate:* Build me a new Lea! Please!

MICHAEL
Never give up hope.
Let's go!

- End -