

# Cybeline

By Abbie Conant and William Osborne (2002)

*She is costumed as a Cyborg and has a MIDI glove controller on her right hand (or is outfitted with some similar sort of cyborgian device.) There is a large video screen to her right (or a large screen above her, under which she sits slightly to the right.)*

*Cybeline is unlit. We see her head down, asleep in the darkness. The soft music of Cybeline's body emerges along with images on the video screen. The music and images build to a cybernetic torrent.*

*A loud warning beeper sounds four pulses followed by the loud, thumping clunk of a heavy industrial switch which puts Cybeline on air. A bright spot appears on her. Her head immediately snaps erect as she abruptly comes to life. Canned stadium applause and cheers as at a rock concert. She acknowledges her public showbiz style--Thank you, thank you, etc.-- then at the zap sound she abruptly cuts off the applause with a sweeping gesture and speaks with showbiz élan to her imaginary audience:*

Tonight, ladies and gentlemen,  
we have a whole bevy of special guests.  
But we'll be back in a moment  
after a word from our sponsor.

*She gestures a cut-off in unison with the same industrial switch as she is cut off-air. She goes out of T.V. personality mode. Irritated, she speaks to the image of Bill on the screen:*

Turn me up, Bill!  
I can hardly hear myself.  
And can you make that applause a little more real?  
Where'd you get that bunch, at an eye operation?

*Beeper sounds four warning pulses, and the clunk of the industrial switch sounds. As she is put back on-line. With grand showbiz enthusiasm, she addresses the public, and interviews Hildegard von Bingen who appears as cartoons. The pauses for responses are brief silences filled with music.*

Well we're back!  
Our opening guest tonight  
is the fabulous Hildegard von Bingen.  
Let's give a nice welcome.

*She turns and gestures to the screen. With a zap sound an image of Hildegard suddenly appears. She conducts an interview dividing her attention between the screen and the public. (Generally begin each phrase facing the screen and end it facing the public.)*

Thank you for being on the show, Hildy.  
I realize you have a busy schedule,  
what with all that praying,  
doctoring, composing, and herbs.

When do you ever get time to have visions?

Did you have any idea you'd have  
such a grand comeback in the 90's?

*Pause. She turns her head and speaks straight into camera:*  
Sorry Hildy. I mean the NINETEEN 90's.

*She turns back front:*

Come on now, tell us the truth about you and the Pope.

*She looks at the screen, sees a phallic shape, coyly puts her hand over her mouth in shock, and turns to the public:*

We'll be back in a flash with more!

*She gestures a cutoff in unison with the clunk of the industrial switch and is taken off-line. Only the back ground music of her body remains. She addresses the audience. Reflective, no longer in showbiz mode:*

Sometimes I turn everything off  
and imagine what it would be like  
if I had to go it alone.

*She faces back front and makes a sound gesture with her MIDI hand.*

No sound fortress...

*she makes another gesture, contemplating the sound*

...tcha, or maybe it's a closet...ditto.

Oh, I used to go without these gizmos...then something  
happened.

*Another contemplated sound gesture.*

All chips and no old blocks, that's my house.

*A longer more elaborate sound gesture.*

As long as the air wiggles a world around me,  
as long as I have my sound,  
I feel safe.

*More hand music.*

*She is cut off by the buzzer and industrial switch, and put back on-line. She returns to showbiz mode. Four voices, each coming from a different speaker present an advertisement. As the commercial on the video runs, she takes a long wooden pointer attached to the side of her chair. (Underlined text always indicates pre-recorded voices on the soundtrack.)*

*(First speaker:)* And now its time for Cyborg's Top Ten Pet Peeves.  
*(Second speaker:)* Brought to you by Toss-A-Chip.  
*(Third speaker:)* Remember, when it comes to plugging-in that new personality, clinical tests show our circuits to be the best.  
*(Fourth speaker:)* Toss-A-Chip and you'll get that raise you always wanted.  
*(All voices together:)* Toss-A-Chip and the evening will go right.

*She raised the pointer and returns to her showbiz persona:*  
And so here they are, my beloved viewers,  
Cyborg's Top Ten Pet Peeves.

*A cyborgian voice announces each number. With a touch of indignant seriousness, she lectures, using the pointer to indicate specific details illustrated by the on-screen drawings. (She generally points on the last word of each phrase, and continues pointing until the next phrase. Make each peeve a separate entity.)*

10. When your wires short circuit on your fillings.
9. Someone spills coffee in your body fluid chamber.
8. People talk about you as if you were a mere computer.
7. Some jerk propositions you from Neptune.
6. Software crushes.
5. Stinky silicone.
4. SimSex.
3. Renegade spawning applications foaming in the eyeballs.
2. When your Appropriate Behavior Software malfunctions at a party and you end up wearing a monitor on your head.

*A cyborgian voice announces: And for the number one Pet Peeve of Cyborgs all over the known universe.*

*Long silence. In a subdued voice:*

1. Defaulting to silence.

*Long silence as she stares forward. At the clunk she is taken off-air. Her head falls and she becomes lifeless, as if shut off. Long pause, silent and motionless. unconscious. Her head jerks up as she is brought back to life and on-line, showbiz mode by the buzzer. She divides her focus between the screen and public as before.*

So ladies and gentlemen--she returns the pointer to its holder--  
our next guest is the amazing Hypatia--  
the gorgeous math geek of Alexandria,  
astronomer extraordinaire  
philosopher and teacher.

*To screen:*

Hypatia – you look great.

*Aside to audience, with hand held to mouth as if shielding a whisper:*  
Doesn't she look great? Not bad for the fourth century!

*Alternate looking between looking at the screen and audience:*

No sign of that little incident  
with those monks in the streets  
of dear old Alexandria.

Watch out, though.  
Religious folk are still mean buggers.

*Aside to audience:*

They just can't leave well enough alone.

*Alternating between looking at screen and audience:*

What crossed through your mind  
when they came at you with their sharpened shells?

*She exuberantly raises her arms as she turns to the public:*

We've come a long way, baby!  
We've made big progress as a...

*She partially lowers her arms as she becomes more doubtful:*

As a...

*She looks at her cyborgian hand. Pause. She snaps out of it and goes back to showbiz. She raises her hand and slams it on her knee on the last note to gesture a cutoff:*

Pardon me Hypatia, it's time for a commercial break!

*Clunk sound of industrial switch. Off-air. A sudden swirl of whispering surrounds her. Long pause as she listens. She speaks quietly:*

Sometimes behind the buzzes and whines of the wires  
I hear the bird breast soft callings of the old she Gods.

*She makes music with her hand (the MIDI glove controller or similar type device) and listens to the whispers.*

Their presence is like humming bird breath.

*Music and whispers.*

Moon glowing palescent lips of fetal fawns  
light on my bare skin  
like hundreds of buttery butterflies in the thick night.

*Beeper. Clunk of industrial switch. On-air. A loud quadraphonic advertisement bursts upon the silence.*

*Tech-flesh!*

*We can grow it for you wholesale!*

*Improve your capacity as a DNA docking station.*

*You can implant a DX-84 gender card today*

*And be that Barbie you always wanted to be.*

*(The voice quickens to blazing speed:)*

*Compatible with all motherboards,*

Manufacturer not responsible for crashes...  
And side effects such as  
Memory loss, CPU burnout, or transistor meltdowns.  
Ninety day money back guarantee.

*As the advertisement plays, Cybeline quietly takes an old, humorously beat-up, red cowboy hat and some sheet music, both attached to the side of her chair, and places them in her lap. She announces her next routine:*

And now what you've all been waiting for:  
Song of the Week!  
Today's song was sent in by Hannah Ditorchio  
of Gallup, New Mexico.

*The lead-in sounds. She puts the hat on the word "Number":*  
It is entitled "Number Crunchin' Cowboy."

*She sings the song:*

Just the other day I was surfin' in the bay  
When a big roan horse came a galloping my way  
The cowboy on his back had a rhinestone power Mac  
And I could clearly hear he was callin' out my number

He's a number crunchin' cowboy,  
And if I calculate just right  
He'll be workin' at my keyboard  
His arms around me tight.

He's a number crunchin' cowboy,  
He's the man up on my screen,  
He's the best of all statistics,  
He's the email of my dreams.

He's no Microsoft when we head up to the loft.  
He's the best programmer out of greater Albuquerque.  
Exchangin' gigabytes on his laptop late at night,  
He's got my heart on-line and I've learned some trigonometry.

He's a number crunchin' cowboy,  
And if I calculate just right  
He'll be workin' at my keyboard  
His arms around me tight.

*She is taken off-line at the clunk. Somewhat more resigned, she speaks to her public over the Cyborg Body Music. She looks at the screen:*

As you can see, my producers aren't too happy with me.  
What producers? What me?  
I'm only pretending to be a talk show host.  
In an hour they will arrive for my evaluation.

They will decide if I'm a human.

And how can I show them, you will ask.

Well, based on my observations humans are—  
*--she points to the screen as a figure representing each third appears:*

One third sensation.

One third memory.

And one third show biz.

So what better way to show the scientists I'm human  
than being a singing and dancing talk show host.

Makes sense to me, but then maybe I'm not human.

*She is buzzed back on-line, but does not react. She simply looks at the lighting and stage machinery around her. Her head movements are slow and dream-like.*

*The drums refocus her attention on her routines. She enthusiastically and energetically returns her attention to her public. At the zap, she gestures to the screen with a fully extended arm.*

So folks, did I ever tell you about the geek  
who thought that computers  
could become opera singers?

*With a zap and a gesture a cartoon drawing appears of rotund Brunhilde appears*

He was found still sitting  
in his chair in front of his computer.  
Flat as a pancake!

*Sung very operatically:*

Apparently a soprano broke through security  
and flattened him in one sitting.

*Zap sound. Cartoon of the Brunhilde sitting on a squashed geek in his chair. The music of Schubert's "Am Feierabend" emerges.*

That's how I'll show them I'm human:  
*She raises her arms similar to those in the image on the screen--*  
I'll be a singer--*and sings operatically--*  
a voice of humanity--  
even if they think I'm only partly human.

*Short pause.*

We all want to become raw song, don't we.

*She slowly lowers her arms, and sings:*

With a thousand arms as their master!  
Could I turn the wheel even faster!  
Could I buffet the wind and weather!

Heave up both stones together!

That the fairest master might see  
How faithful I can be!  
That the fairest master might see  
How devoted I can be!

*She is cut off-air by the clunk, and falters as she realizes she has been taken off-line.*

Ach, but I am frail...of...frame...

*She pauses an instant, perplexed that she has been cut off, turns to the screen and protests to the panel of scientists pictured:*

Hey, turn me back on! *Pause.*  
Come on, there's more to the song.  
Have you no respect for art!

*Pause. Working to maintain her dignity, she turns back front:*

Well, if I have no producers--no show--the question is:  
Will my examiners be satisfied with me?  
Of course, if they are only equations too,  
the question is obviously irrelevant.

Equations can't be happy or disappointed, I suppose.  
They can only serve.

*Back front. Normal voice:*

Now come one, turn me back on.  
I'm an entertainer, you know.  
Let's get this show back on the road.  
You know a little razz-a-tazz,  
a little sing-song and buzzing wires...

*Her protestations are cut off by the buzzer and she is put back on-air. An advertisement airs:*

*And now it's time for True Crimes, brought to you by  
Police Dog! Police Dog goes where you go. Police Dog  
is loyal. Police Dog can recognize and liquidate your  
enemies. Police Dog, without all the muss and fuss of a  
real Fido.*

*As the advertisement is pronounced she takes the wood pointer from the side of the chair and assumes the demeanor of a hyper-masculine, hard-boiled detective showing slides of a crime scene.*

Here is Philadelphia's Rape and Mutilation Victim Number  
933.

*Slide changes to another view.*

Her name was Maxine...O'Donnell.  
She was studying social work at Penn.

*Slide changes.*

Her attacker was out of jail  
pending psychiatric evaluation.  
He worked at the Cyberfiber plant  
as a special projects manager.

*Slide changes.*

She had had coffee with him.  
He was interested in her.  
She was intrigued with him.  
Then...

*The word "then" is echoed twice with electronic distortion. Short blast of violent sound. She is cut off the air. Long pause in silence.*

Even if I could go back in time  
what would I change?

*She hears whispered voices (in the left box below.) Long pause as she listens. She speaks the words in the box on the right:*

<p><i>Ordered randomly:</i> <u>...wet earth...the burning fields...box</u> <u>turtles parked temporarily in doorless</u> <u>two by four garages...tornado</u> <u>warnings...amid wild horses...Edgar</u> <u>and the mouse blood on the</u> <u>porch...the yellow stucco house...June</u> <u>bugs on the screen door...spring</u> <u>peepers... bubble bath...I fell asleep</u> <u>praying...the three</u> <u>Marys... Campbell's Chicken and</u> <u>Noodle... Mennonites... Will Rogers</u> <u>Turnpike... Claremore...Mrs.</u> <u>Ricky...the blue cat mask...Mr.</u> <u>Nickels...the washing machine</u> <u>dream...Brown Duncan...</u></p>	<p>Maybe again to feel the child's fearlessness among the wild horses, to smell their damp auras alight with bruised grass notes expanding in transparent shimmering clouds around their shoeless hooves. <i>Short pause.</i> I never knew that death could smell like grazing horses.</p>
--	--

*As the cloud music continues, she performs a solo with her glove controller. A buzzer more elaborate than any before puts her back on-line. Her reaction is partly confused and partly sensual. Briskly addressing her technician on the screen, somewhat dismayed:*

Why Bill, I'm surprised at your beeping!  
But let's not over do it.  
You know how dangerous it can be  
to turn someone on too strongly.

*She turns her focus back forward, a little embarrassed at her bad joke.*

Anyway, after my accident  
I recorded my techie-tenders whispering--  
not too hard when you're constantly wired.

*She mimics a humorously alien voice—nasal and like a robot:*

She's some sort of experiment or mistake,  
a process of healing transformed to a project  
of bio-molecular design.

*She returns to her normal voice and sings exuberantly:*

I moved from proteins to nano-machines--  
a biologically upgraded post-human life.

*She speaks with a cartoony voice like Sylvester the Cat:*

Ah, the synthetic transcendental,  
The consensual hallucinations of networked flesh.  
The multiple self of industrially mediated realities.

*She merges into a Lied by Schubert in a normal voice, dividing her focus between the screen and public.*

That the fairest master might see  
How faithful I can be!  
That the fairest master might see  
How devoted I can be!

Ach, but I am frail of frame  
What I raise up, what I sever,  
What I carry, what I hammer,  
Any one can do the same.

*Clunk. Off-air. She hears Goddess whispers coming through her wires.*

Sometimes when all is quiet  
I hear the cells talking to one another.  
It's like a flock of birds  
that have turned into waves on the beach--

*she makes a gesture with her glove controller triggering the sound of birds morphing to ocean waves—*

or bells—

*--sound gesture—*

millions of nano-bells that have shrunk so small  
that ladybugs could wear them around their ankles.

*Using her MIDI glove, she plays with the sounds of bells, birds and the ocean as she continues.*

The lymph moves like a tug headed upriver with a full load.  
It sounds like the growl of an old Airedale but sustained.  
Music is a cyborg's dream, flowers and birds of spring  
painted on window glass.

*Beeper. Clunk. On-air. She pauses disoriented. Distorted test screens appear.*

I'm sorry folks, but I'm getting some static on my lines.  
I have to do that True Crimes segment again.  
My program says that last version was too loud and aggressive.  
It's all part of my self-corrective software. You can't be too  
careful these days.

*She sings and acts the following story in two voices, one feminine and the other masculine. When she uses the feminine voice she generally looks toward the screen, and when she uses the masculine she looks toward the public. (If the written tessitura is not possible, sing all in the upper octave.)*

*Feminine:* Here is Philadelphia's Rape and Mutilation Victim  
*Masculine:* Number 933.

*Feminine:* Her name was Maxine...O'Donnell.  
*Masculine:* She was studying social work at Penn.

*Feminine:* Her attacker was out of jail  
*Masculine:* pending psychiatric evaluation.

*Feminine:* He seemed so--  
*Masculine:* normal.

*Feminine:* He worked at the Cyberfiber plant  
*Masculine:* as a special projects manager.

*Feminine:* She had had coffee with him.

*Masculine:* He was interested in her.

*Feminine:* She was intrigued with him.

*A flurry of voices crescendos to a loud level. She is taken off-air with the usual sounds. She speaks to her public:*

Humans do not know the torment of endless knowledge,  
the world as a network of a billion hard disks,  
no secrets to spare me pain,  
no sanctuaries in the temple of silence.

A binary world,  
an endless on and off,  
light that gives and takes away.  
My soul vanishes through steel

a thousand times stronger than bone,  
through wired dreams  
a million times faster than nerves.

In this sanctuary, the money changers  
are wired straight into the temple.

*She performs a long a cappella solo with her glove controller. Buzzer. Clunk of switch. On-air. She again sings her story in two voices, as before:*

*Feminine:* They said right in front of her  
*Masculine:* that she couldn't remember anything  
*Feminine:* about her former life.

*A violent blast of music interrupts. She watches the screen.*

*Feminine:* Took the team three years  
to get her up and running.  
*Masculine:* They were concerned that her nerves wouldn't hold out.

*A violent blast of machine music interrupts. .*

*Feminine:* At first they would turn off her cerebral cortex  
*Masculine:* and have their way with her.  
*Feminine:* Then they would just leave it on,  
put her on cybernetic hold  
*Masculine: s* o she couldn't move or react.

*A violent blast of machine music interrupts.*

*Masculine:* And then they erased her memory,  
*Feminine:* or so they thought.

*A violent interlude of machine music dies away in wheezing sounds. After a long pause in silence:*

But memory is everywhere.

*A cloud of whispers emerges and surrounds her.*

<i>Ordered randomly:</i> <u>Mirror I am...timbrels by the Red Sea...</u> <u>Wings of the morning...Deep calleth unto</u> <u>Deep...The way everlasting...Flesh song...</u> <u>Singing in our cells...Door of heaven.</u>  <u>The talking clouds...the coffee colored</u> <u>Tarantula skittering along the side of the</u> <u>road...the full-fledged double rainbow</u>	I hear them right behind the ringing of my ears, the laughter, the singing in full color, rose petal prism crystals of softer than soft all-over nowhere bellflowers.  <i>Hand music.</i>
--	---

<p><u>spanning the red curved earth...</u>  <u>the flash flood moving the</u>  <u>amber waters like terrified cattle</u>  <u>tearing the bottom of a desiccated sea...</u></p> <p><u>Let me see if this be real,</u>  <u>This life I am living?"</u>  <u>Ye who possess the skies,</u>  <u>Let me see if this be real,</u>  <u>This life I am living.</u>  <u>"The thoughts of the earth</u>  <u>are my thoughts...</u>  <u>The voice of the earth is my voice...</u>  <u>The feather of the earth is my feather...</u>  <u>All that belongs to the earth belongs to me.</u>  <u>All that surrounds the earth surrounds me.</u>  <u>I am the sacred words of the earth...</u>  <u>It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.</u></p> <p><u>Wet earth...the burning fields...box</u>  <u>turtles...tornado warnings...</u>  <u>amid wild horses...Edgar and the mouse</u>  <u>blood...on the porch...the yellow</u>  <u>stucco house...June bugs on the</u>  <u>screen door... spring peepers... bubble</u>  <u>bath...I fell asleep praying...the three</u>  <u>Marys...Campbell's Chicken and</u>  <u>Noodle... Mennonites... Will Rogers</u>  <u>Turnpike... Claremore...Mrs.</u>  <u>Ricky...the blue cat mask...Mr. Nickels...</u>  <u>the washing machine</u>  <u>dream...Brown Duncan...</u></p>	<p>The flow of gold--  unimagined, greedless, light, feather essence  my being  shimmering, melting and clear,  extracted from past woe and future deed.</p> <p><i>Hand music.</i></p> <p>Spiralic expansion  from an unknown source long known,  raiment for the journey home,  feathers and sacred bones  of magic beings.</p> <p><i>She continues listening to the whispers.</i></p>
---	---

*Buzzer. Clunk combined with a howling sound. Sound bite from Blade Runner: "Yes, questions." She quotes a passage from the Bible:*

"I was made in secret,  
and curiously wrought  
in the lowest parts of the earth."

*The sound bite from Blade Runner is time stretched: "Yes, questions."*

*She plays a trombone (or a solo on the optional instrument.) She sits in quiet reverie, her hands crossed over her chest. The music merges to another Lied by Schubert which she sings:*

I dreamt of trees and flowers,  
That blossom and bloom in the spring;  
I dreamt of the bright green meadow,

And thrushes and robins that sing.

And as the cocks are crowing,  
I rise and look without;  
The day is cold and dreary,  
The ravens are screaming about.

*The light dims to almost black, only her face lightly lit. She bows her head as if asleep and dreaming while the music and images continue in a portrayal of war and civilian suffering. She extends her arm upward and silently screams to the heavens as in the images on the screen. She slowly releases her scream in line with the descending sounds. The light rises slightly. She raises her head and listens to the music. Long pause. She speaks, quietly and suspended:*

Silence. The speechless singing of wires.  
Does the molten core of the earth seep into me?  
The voice of the gods and goddesses?  
Is it the whisper of silicone,  
Or are they out there...in the dark?

*She sings her final song:*

Feather mother father float,  
weigh less than weightless  
my heart on the balance.

Find my feather a loft  
in oceans of air,  
the blood made ether,  
the wrenching wrought to aught.

No pain in muscle or mind  
in any world of suffering,  
tune the nethers to your  
post-apocalyptic pitch  
and then weigh my heart,  
the feather weight  
dream boxer.

Feather mother father float  
weigh less than weightless,  
my heart on the balance,  
No pain in muscle or mind,  
weigh my heart,  
weigh my heart.

*Light and images fade to black.*

*The end.*