

PARALLEL UNIVERSITY

20-minute Musical

Book by Malina Detcheva-Rossa

Songs:

Undecided & World of Projections:

Music and Lyrics by David Quang Pham

Parallel University, How Do I Make Friends & Parallel Parking:

Music by Marie Incontrera

Lyrics by Malina-Detcheva Rossa

SCENE 1

Corridor in a college dorm. Move-in day. College students and their parents pull luggage and carry boxes. As she speaks on the phone, EMMA, 18, tries to read the names on the students' tags on their t-shirts.

EMMA

Yeah, I'm looking for him right now. No worries, it's gonna be okay. Yes, I'll let you know. Yeah, I'll send you pics from the room, sure. I love you too. Have a safe trip back.

(Emma sees a student, NEIL, talking to another student and their parents).

NEIL

The laundry room is in the basement, the dining hall is in the building across the courtyard, but this floor has a great lounge with a kitchen...

(He notices that EMMA tries to read his name on the tag.)

NEIL

Hi, if you're looking for the Resident Advisor of the floor, that's me. I'm Neil. Nice to meet you, Emma.

EMMA

Oh, hi. Huh, yes, huh, I was looking for you.

NEIL

Did you find your room? Do you need help?

Yes, but the key doesn't work. I couldn't open the door.

(Neil seems embarrassed.)

NEIL

Room 929?

EMMA

Oh, so you know there's problem with this key? But why did they give it to me at registration downstairs? Should I ask for another key?

NEIL

Well... the key that you have is statistically the best.

EMMA

Statistically? I don't understand. This key doesn't open my room.

NEIL

I understand. What corridor did you take from the elevator to your room?

EMMA

I don't know. There are so many, I got lost at some point... But what does it have to do with the fact that my key doesn't work?

NEIL

Do you remember making a sort of Z shape trajectory?

EMMA

Yeah... Now that you mention it... But, I'm really sorry - what's the point?

NEIL

What's your major?

EMMA

I'm undecided.

NEIL

Ah! But, I mean, are you more on the science or the artsy side?

EMMA

I like math, but didn't like chemistry.

NEIL

And how about physics?

EMMA

Not my thing either. Why?

NEIL

Oh, I'm just trying to figure out how to better explain the situation to you. So, okay, listen – It happens that a few parallel universities are intertwining on this campus...

EMMA

You mean?

NEIL

Like four, exactly. And depending on which corridor you take from the elevator to go to the community room; you land in a different reality.

EMMA

Different reality?!

NEIL

The four of them look almost the same, technically. Still, in these parallel realities people act differently and have different interests and, even different majors. It's like there are other universities parallel to the one where you and I are having this

discussion right now. We are still talking, but we don't say the same thing, and we think differently. This campus is a place where a few universities overlap, exist in parallel, do you understand?

EMMA

(Laughing nervously)

Oh yeah, I understand. You mean that this is a place of many possibilities; when we arrive here, our choices can potentially lead us to different experiences and futures. The choice of the corridor is a metaphor, right? Are you an English major?

NEIL

No. I'm majoring in Astrophysics. And what I'm telling you is a fact, a reality, a scientific phenomenon, not a metaphor. When I was a freshman. I came in undecided, but because of this, I decided to become a scientist. And asked to be the RA of this floor because I wanted to help the new students to avoid the tricks the Quantum is playing here. When they arrive, they don't have any relevant experience that can help them decipher the situation.

EMMA

Oh, but I do have experience with complicated situations. And this one seems to me relatively easy. I just need another key.

(Three other students, Jazz, Marilyn, and Descartes, get closer to them.)

MARILYN

Excuse me, are you the RA of the floor? The lights in my room don't work.

JAZZ

Hello, I see you're Neil, the RA. I'm Jazz - they, them. The AC in my room was working when I got there. Then I walked to the elevator to say bye to my 'rents and when I came back – it was off, and the room was so hot!

DESCARTES

The window of my room doesn't close...

NEIL

Hi, folks! I know, there are some malfunctions – let me explain things to you...

DESCARTES

What kind of university allows so much malfunctioning?!

NEIL

Good question. Well, this specific malfunctioning comes from the fact that a few parallel universities are colliding here on this campus. When something works in some of them, it doesn't work in others. So, we try to find the statistically best solution. You're in a place where each reality is only one out of many possibilities. And you need to know that while you're physically in one of them, there is so much going on simultaneously in all other universities parallel to it. I hope you, guys, understand?!

DESCARTES

Sure, you're right! And that's exactly what I've dreamt for since I became sentient –a place to learn and experiment the real life, in parallel from what society and parents wanted to teach me. The Parallel University is just real life; all that's going on outside the classroom, do I get you right?

DESCARTES

PARALLEL UNIVERSITY!
LIFE'S FINALLY A POSSIBILITY
PARALLEL UNIVERSITY
A LAND OF WISDOM AND TRANQUILITY!

MARILYN

PARALLEL UNIVERSITY-
IT'S BETTER THAN ALL THE MOVIES THAT I HAVE
SEEN
PARALLEL UNIVERSITY-
SO MANY ROLES TO TRY ON A REAL-LIFE SCREEN!

DESCARTES, MARILYN, JAZZ, EMMA

NO MORE TARDIES
NO DRESS CODE
LOTS OF PARTIES
DOWN THE ROAD
SAT SCORE -
NO MORE STRESS!
WE PASSED THE DOOR
FREEDOM - YES!

JAZZ
PARALLEL UNIVERSITY
ROOM FOR SWING AND SYNCOPATION
PARALLEL UNIVERSITY
TIME FOR WILD IMPROVISATION

NEIL

Hey y'all,

YOU'RE RIGHT
IN SOME WAY
AFTER ALL
IT'S NOT LIKE
THERE IS
A BLACK HOLE
IT'S JUST
A COLLIDE
A BANG
OF FOUR WORLDS.

YOU NEED
EXPERIENCE
TO LEARN
TO AVOID
THE SHOCK
AND NOT TO
GET CAUGHT
INTO THIS
DISMAL
QUANTUM JOKE
BUT, WELL
WE'LL TALK
ONCE
YOU GET IT
RIGHT, FOLKS?

CHORUS 2

SCENE 2

(Lounge. Descartes is already there when Emma walks in.)

EMMA

Hi!

DESCARTES

Oh, hi!

(He waves.)

DESCARTES

I'm Descartes.

EMMA

Descartes? Is that your real name?

DESCARTES

Yes, why?

EMMA

Isn't that the name of a French uh... writer?

DESCARTES

A philosopher – yes.

EMMA

Oh, sorry, maybe it's your last name? Are you guys related?

DESCARTES

With René Descartes? No. BTW, Descartes is my first name. My mother was so in love with her philosophy teacher in college, that she decided to keep me, even though the guy was married and returned to France with his family and kids at the end of the school year.

EMMA

Oh, I'm sorry. I always ask stupid questions.

DESCARTES

No worries. I'm used to it.

EMMA

So, you don't know your father?

DESCARTES

Oh, I do. We see each other on Zoom. We speak philosophy. How about you?

EMMA

Um, I don't talk philosophy with my parents. I'm Emma.

DESCARTES

Where are you from?

EMMA

Maine.

DESCARTES

Where in Maine?

EMMA

A small place.

DESCARTES

I see, and what's the biggest city there?

EMMA

Would be Dover Foxcroft.

DESCARTES

Never heard of it.

(The door opens. JAZZ enters.)

JAZZ

What's the craic, folks?

DESCARTES AND EMMA

Oh, hi.

JAZZ

(Offering to shake hands with Emma)

I am Jazz.

EMMA

Oh, Jazz, what a great name! I'm Emma. How are you, Jazz?

JAZZ

Jazz is not my real name, but we'll go with it. That's what they call me back there.

(Descartes steps towards Jazz; they shake hands too.)

DESCARTES

I'm Descartes. And it's my real name! Who calls you Jazz? And where's 'back there'?

JAZZ

My fam, baby momma, the bruhs from the band.

EMMA

What kind of a band?

JAZZ

(Laughing)

I'll let you guess. I'm from N'Arlins, beautiful.

EMMA

I don't know...

JAZZ

Oh, come on. Are you serious? Here's a hint – my name is...

EMMA

Jazz...

JAZZ

There you go.

EMMA

Sorry, I didn't want to sound cliché.

JAZZ

No prob. And it's not cliché. It's vibes. I always bring my sax with me, no matter where I go. I hope they have practice rooms here. And you, where are you from?

DESCARTES

She's from Dover Foxcroft. Have you ever heard of it?

JAZZ

(To Emma)

Naw. What kind of music do they play?

EMMA

I don't know about music, but we grow organic broccoli and green beans.

(Marilyn enters, conducting a tour for someone with her phone.)

MARILYN

That's the lounge. The RA said that we're meeting here. Ok, there are some people already here. I miss you, babe, I miss the set. Smack, smack! Bye!

(To the group.)

Hi guys! Who's growing organic broccoli?

EMMA

My parents. I actually live on a farm.

MARILYN

But that's awesome! OMG, that's real life. Being close to nature, doing sun salutations every morning...

EMMA

Yes, we usually start the work in the field very early in the morning.

MARILYN

Great! Are you vegetarian? Oh no, wait, broccoli and green beans – you must be vegetarian?

EMMA

My parents are agricultures, I mean farmers. But I eat everything.

MARILYN

Oh, okay. I'm Marilyn, guys. Sorry - I was on the phone with my boyfriend. We met on the set of "Hotels." He's also a singer, Ron Giordan, he released his single just before the third season of...

DESCARTES

Wait, are you Marilyn Donald? The one who plays the manager's mistress in "Hotels"?

MARILYN

Yup.

JAZZ

Oh, is your character off for the next season or is the series cancelled?

MARILYN

The manager will have another mistress in seasons 4, but then, if the series doesn't get cancelled, I'll take a gap year from college and the manager'll go back to his previous mistress – me. My agent's a genius, isn't he?

(Marilyn laughs at her own joke.)

EMMA

So, you're an actress! How did you become an actress?

MARILYN

Well, three out of my dad's five wives were in the film industry. The third one was a casting director. It helps.

EMMA

And your mom?

MARILYN

I barely remember her. I was five when we got into a car accident.

EMMA and JAZZ

Sorry...

MARILYN

No worries, I revisited my trauma thanks to a scene my dad wrote for me in one of his movies. I moved on and I'm now at peace.

DESCARTES

Hi, I'm Descartes. I don't see how this can be freeing you from your loss. I would say it would make it more painful.

MARILYN

Yes, but it depends on how you write the scene. The way my dad wrote it, my mom caused the accident and along comes a superwoman, played by my dad's new wife who jumps into the flames of the burning car to save me and my dad. Well, the way she saved him was a little lame, but overall, it worked – she and I bonded immediately.

EMMA

Is that what really happened?

MARILYN

I don't know. From that moment on, I decided to always live in films and never in reality.

(To Emma.)

And you?

EMMA

Well, I've always lived in reality with my two parents and their farm.

MARILYN

Still the same? I mean, still the same parents, and still together?

EMMA

Yep. And I'm Emma.

MARILYN

(To Descartes)

And you said you're Descartes, right? I like your name. So French!

(To Jazz)

And you?

JAZZ

Jazz.

MARILYN

Yay, guys, it's so exciting! You have amazing names! I feel we are gonna be friends. Have you decided your majors already?

JAZZ

Yup.

MARILYN

(Laughing)

Don't tell me it's music?!

JAZZ

(Laughing)

You got it, girl! And you know why? Kuz as I walk, there's music streaming through my head just like this.

(He's snapping his fingers.)

DESCARTES

Wait, I have this same feeling, but what's streaming through my head are thoughts, ideas, concepts, questionings...

MARILYN

Same with me, it's just that there are sort of dreams and scenes, and dialogues streaming through my head.

JAZZ

When I was 7, I told my folks – “My head's singing me a song”

(Suddenly, all of them turn towards Emma.)

EMMA

Oh, huh... I'm not sure I get any of this... I mean, if you are talking about Wi-Fi connection, we had issues with the reception, we tried different providers, and we changed the routers a few times.

(They all seem even more perplexed.)

EMMA

Oh, maybe we are not talking about the same thing. Sorry, I can be awkward sometimes, I'm really sorry.

DESCARTES

(Trying to help)

No worries. We were talking more about personal inspiration.

JAZZ

(Trying to help too)

'Bout the groove, honey.

MARILYN

Dreams, projections, future...

(Neil, who's watching the scene from the open door, enters into the lounge.)

NEIL

Hi guys, you were talking about your majors, right? What major are you thinking of, Emma?

EMMA

(Relieved)

Oh, I'm undecided.

(Emma's answer provokes an even more awkward silence.)

JAZZ

But, no worries, y'all. It's definitely a bummer, but I'm sure she'll figure it out at some point.

MARILYN

Yeah, it really is a bummer. It must be hard to live without fantasies and desire!

DESCARTES

I would say, the most difficult thing in this situation is the lack of beliefs.

EMMA

But isn't it the reason we go to college – to take time to discover all the possible paths and jobs waiting for us?

MARILYN

I don't think anyone's waiting for us. Out there, the competition's fierce. You need to know what you want and how to fight for it. And the sooner you know it, the farther you'll go.

DESCARTES

We forge our character through our determination towards our goals. One can't be strong if he doesn't have a goal and direction.

JAZZ

I mean, it's not a tragedy, but it must just be hard to live without feeling the bit in your guts, that's all I know.

EMMA

But I'm fine! I'm just undecided.

SONG EMMA
UNDECIDED

SCENE 3

(Small hallway in front of the elevators. We see the inscription "9th floor." Emma is waiting for the elevator. Jazz joins her. They seem happy so see each other.)

JAZZ

Hey, hi, how is it goin'?

EMMA

Oh, hi, good! How about you? Did you find a practice room?

JAZZ

Why?

EMMA

I mean, you wanted to play sax, right? You said you brought it with you...

JAZZ

What, the heck, are you sayin'? I told you I don't like to talk about it –

EMMA

But you said you can't live without it – remember – the vibes, the bit in the guts.

JAZZ

Hey, you! I Why are you getting on my nerves like this? Didn't I tell you that my father put me into this business when I was 7, talking jazz vibes and crap, and if you want to be my friend, you should never say the word "practice."

EMMA

But you said, you liked it.

(The elevator doors open. Jazz enters and turns towards Emma talking to her as the doors are closing.)

JAZZ

Yesterday, I thought you're chill. But I don't have time to lose with people like you.

(The elevator doors close, Emma is still in the 9th floor hall. Descartes joins her.)

DESCARTES

Oh, hi there! How do you feel after a night on the campus? Btw, do you have a good Wi-Fi connection?

EMMA

Works pretty well. Much better than on our farm.

(Descartes keeps pushing nervously the buttons of the elevator.)

DESCARTES

It takes an eternity for these elevators to come. Nothing works here. But the “no Wi-Fi” is what bothers me the most.

EMMA

Thankfully you have that streaming...

DESCARTES

What streaming?

EMMA

I mean, the inner one – all these thoughts and questionings...

DESCARTES

What questionings and thoughts?

EMMA

The one you’re receiving in your head... I mean, the one you were talking about yesterday?

DESCARTES

I never said I was mental!

(The elevator doors open. The elevator is full. Descartes gets in making room for himself and says quickly while the doors are closing.)

DESCARTES

We’ll talk later. Just know that integrity starts with yourself.

(The doors close. Marilyn joins Emma.)

MARILYN

Oh, hi.

EMMA

Hi.

MARILYN

How are you.

EMMA

I'm fine. How are you?

MARILYN

I'm good.

EMMA

Good.

MARILYN

Good.

EMMA

Yeah, nice.

MARILYN

You know what?! I hate when people pretend not to recognize me. Like they would binge-watch my show, but then when they meet with me for real, they'll ignore me. Why do you ghost me like this? I hate when people do this to me. Yesterday you were so nice and I answered all your questions and revealed to you secrets I'm not supposed to reveal to anyone about season 3 of "Hotels..." I really thought we could be friends. Really, why do you ignore me today?!

EMMA

I'm sorry, Marilyn, it's because I'm not sure that I remember well enough what happened yesterday between you and me.

MARILYN

You know what! What you're doing right now is horrible! Am I so insignificant, that you don't even remember what I told you yesterday?

(The elevator doors open, Marilyn gets inside and turns towards Emma, talking to her, while the doors are closing.)

MARILYN

In season one I had a line "How do I make friends when they change their mind every night?" Now, I finally get it.

(The elevator doors close. Neil joins Emma.)

NEIL

Hi Emma, how is it going?

EMMA

Hi.

NEIL

Something wrong?

EMMA - SONG

HOW DO I MAKE FRIENDS WHEN THEY CHANGE THEIR MIND EVERY NIGHT?

NEIL

Oh, I think I know what's going on here. It was the same for me. But don't worry, you'll feel better, once you get it. What's happening here, is exactly what I told you. There are scientific space-temporal phenomena happening here, but from our point of view, we can only see limited projections of the multidimensional world we live in. Philosophies, words, music, metaphors, are just a few ways to describe these projections. Like in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, we, humans enchained in a cave, only see the shadows of what's really going on in the real world, outside of our cave. Only science can help us understand the Universe in its fullness.

NEIL - SONG

WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF PROJECTIONS

SCENE 4

(Lounge room. Marilyn, Descartes, Neil and Jazz are already there. They seem nervous, each of them texting and going back and forth from the couch to the window. Emma enters.)

MARILYN

Oh, hi, Emma. That conversation at the party last night was soooo cool! I sent a few pics of you to my dad; he'll give them to his casting director. Okay, it's not a big role, but he texted that you're photogenic. I know what it means, when Dad says this about a girl. You'll get the role! Did you sign up for the online class I told

you about? it's really the best one, combining Actors' Studio with Meisner technic!

JAZZ

What! When did you both talk about that? I thought last night we agreed Emma was joining my new band. It was good that you sang at the party, Emma! Otherwise, I would never know what an amazing voice you have!

MARYLYN

What are you talking about! She didn't sing. She said she was too shy to sing. And I asked her if she would like to be an actress, and she said that that's always been her dream, but that she didn't know how to achieve it out there in the middle of the broccoli and the green beans fields.

DESCARTES

I didn't realize all of you were so drunk, last night, guys! Last night, Emma talked about green beans and broccoli, but it was a deep reflection about how our food defines us as human beings. And she said that she'll take a philosophy class with me next semester.

MARILYN

Maybe you are the one who was too drunk last night, Descartes! Jazz offered Emma broccoli and green beans to make a joke and Emma made them dance on the table like she did when she was a kid. And because she spoke of Chaplin's movies, and said she's always wanted to be an actress, I offered...

JAZZ

Wait, am I hallucinating here?! I didn't bring any broccoli or green beans last night! I only improv'd a song with the words broccoli and green beans, and Emma jumped in, and started singing with me, and I told her – "What a voice, girl!" and ...

(To Emma)

Right, Emma?

DESCARTES

Yeah, Emma, tell them what happened last night?!

MARILYN

Yeah, tell them, Emma!

*(They all turns towards Emma, expecting her answer.
Emma stands like she's frozen.)*

EMMA

(Very slowly, as if she's checking to see if her friends would agree with her.)

Huuuh, last night... we had a party, with the theme "Tomorrow's Parent's Day." We wanted to make fun of what our parents would bring or tell us first, when they arrive.

JAZZ

You good so far! Go ahead!

DESCARTES

Yes, that's completely accurate, so far.

MARILYN

Absolutely! And then you....

EMMA

And, because we've already had different interpretations of what we've said to each other so many times, I told you that I believe that Neil is right. I told you that I believe that depending on which corridor we take, we land in different realities and we think and act differently in these different realities. And I also told you that I've decided to major in Astrophysics, because I want to understand how the collision of four different parallel universes on this campus works.

JAZZ

Sorry, but that's bullshit! It's not what happened!

MARILYN

You're so inconsistent, Emma! You're not going to make it in the industry, I'm telling you.

DESCARTES

For the first time I agree with Marilyn. One of the first characteristics of a human being is its moral dimension. I have longtime debated with myself about that, but now I know that consistency is the foundation of the moral! You cannot say things that are impossible to prove!

(The four of them have their phones ringing simultaneously. They all answer and go quickly to the window.)

DESCARTES

Yeah, there is one spot just under the window. It's in front of the big red truck. Hurry up, there are other cars coming.

MARILYN

Yeah, there is one spot just under the window. It's in front of the big red truck. Hurry up, there are other cars coming.

JAZZ

Yeah, there is one spot just under the window. It's in front of the big red truck. Hurry up, there are other cars coming.

EMMA

Yeah, there is one spot just under the window. It's in front of the big red truck. Hurry up, there are other cars coming.

SONG - PARALLEL PARKING

THE FOUR OF THEM GUIDE SIMULTANEOUSLY THEIR PARENTS TO THE SAME PARKING SPOT, WITH THE SAME INSTRUCTIONS UNTIL THEIR RESPECTIVE PARENTS FINALLY PARK IN THE SAME SPOT.

JAZZ

Good job, fam! Oh – there are all the bruhs from the band coming too!

DESCARTES

Good job, mom! Look up, I'm here, the window on the 9th floor. Oh, is this my real father?! Looks like him. I didn't realize he was so small!

MARILYN

Good job, dad! Look up... Oh, we have a new wife?!

EMMA

Hi mom, look up, I'm at the window on the 9th floor. Oh, no, please, leave the case of broccoli in the trunk! Oh, okay, that's actually funny. Good idea - we'll make Halloween decorations with them. Thank you, guys. Oh, and, by the way, I'll be

majoring in science. No, not chemistry – astrophysics. Not physics – astrophysics!
But wait, I'm coming down.

ALL – END OF THE SONG PARALLEL PARKING:
THERE'S A SPOT FOR EACH ONE OF US
SOMEWHERE
IN SOME VERSION OF THE WORLD

END