

VIDEO, MUSIC, DANCE, PERFORMANCE & FILM  
**THE KITCHEN**

**PERFECT  
LIVES**

PERFECT LIVES

Scene: The Perfect Lives Lounge

Place: A small town in the Midwest

Time: The present, early summer. One day elapses, with scenes of before and after.

Characters: "R", a singer (the storyteller)

Buddy, "The World's Greatest Piano Player"

Isolde (Marie Isolde)

"D", Isolde's brother, known as "The Captain of The Football Team" (his parents call him Donnie.)

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The Seven Episodes are:

1. THE PARK - Portrait of a traveling man, perhaps the singer, "R", himself.
2. THE SUPERMARKET - Portrait of the Old Man and Woman, Helen and John, in the landscape of a large Mid-western supermarket.
3. THE BANK - Witnesses at The Bank. Ed and Gwyn elope.
4. THE BAR - Rodney, The Bartender, meets Buddy and his friend.
5. THE LIVING ROOM - Will and Ida discuss the trouble at The Bank.
6. THE CHURCH - Ed and Gwyn arrive, Dwayne and "D" attending. Lucille appears.
7. THE BACKYARD - Portrait of Isolde, a mysterious epilogue in the twilight of The Backyard.

PERFECT LIVES

An opera in 7 half-hour episodes written and created for television by Robert Ashley

Commissioned for television by The Kitchen  
Produced by Robert Ashley and The Kitchen in association with  
Channel Four Television (Great Britain)

Realized in collaboration with:

Carlota Schoolman (television producer)  
"Blue" Gene Tyranny (music collaborator)  
John Sanborn (director)  
Peter Gordon (music producer)

Paul Schorr (soundtrack producer)  
Mary Ashley (design collaborator)  
Jacqueline Humbert (costumes and make-up)  
Mary Perillo (associate director/producer, font design)  
Dean Winkler (video synthesis and video tape editor)

Starring:

Robert Ashley as "R"  
"Blue" Gene Tyranny as Buddy (The World's Greatest Piano Player)

Jill Kroesen as Isolde  
David Van Tiegham as "D" (The Captain of the Football Team)

## PERFECT LIVES

### Synopsis

Raoul de Noget (No-zhay), a singer, and his friend, Buddy, "The World's Greatest Piano Player", have come to this small town in the Midwest to entertain at The Perfect Lives Lounge. For some reason, unexplained, they have fallen in with two people from the town, Isolde ("nearing 30 and not yet spoken for") and her brother, "D", just out of high school and known as "The Captain of The Football Team" (his parents call him Donnie) to commit the perfect crime, a metaphor for something philosophical: in this case, to remove a sizable amount of money from The Bank for one day (and one day only) and let "the whole world know that it was missing."

"D" is currently Assistant to the Manager at The Bank. He learns that Gwyn, one of the tellers, intends to elope with his friend, Ed. "D" is asked to "come along" with Dwayne, another friend, who has a problem speaking (that is, he speaks, but has trouble being understood). "D" knows the key to opening the safe. The plan is, then: to take away the money in Ed's car to Indiana (goal of the elopers), to keep it in circulation, as it were. They leave at 5 AM.

While the lovers are in passage, Raoul and Buddy, with Buddy's dogs, and separately, Isole enter The Bank at midday. The dogs create a ruckus ("like a noise from Hades") that gives Isolde the excuse to get a bucket of water from next door to throw at the dogs and miss and soak the Bank Manager, who goes into the safe for a change of clothes, only to discover that The Bank "has no money in The Bank". As part of the plan, Isolde has phoned the Sheriff's Office, disguising

her voice (her father, Will, is The Sheriff, and his wife is Ida) to report an accident "out on the highway". There is no "accident", of course, and recognizing the meaning of the decoy, Will puts it all together later under Ida's questioning. But it's too late.

Among the tellers (Jennifer, Kate, Eleanor, Linda, and Susie) who are witnesses to the dogfight and the terrible discovery and who understand what happened, from different points of view, so to speak, only Susie noticed that the dogs "went out together", and she's not telling. She fell in love at first sight with Buddy, who because of his fancy style of dress is often mistaken for a foreigner ("There's no doubt the Mexican is in it. The doubt is that he's Mexican.") That was at 12:45 PM ("remember that!"). And in The Bank at that time are Helen and John, innocent by-standers from The Home, doing business "on a holiday". That is, they have fallen in love (in the Home), but they are not allowed to marry, or "one will lose the privileges". So, every other weekend, they take adjoining rooms at the motel right off The Park (where, by coincidence, Raoul and Buddy live, and where we first met Raoul trying to order breakfast on the phone). This is just the beginning of their weekend, and at 3 PM we see them in The Supermarket, shopping, a little jangled, set against each other by the excitement, but far from down and out.

Sometime later, probably Monday, in The Bar, Buddy and Raoul on their "day off from music" have come to celebrate little knowing that there they will meet Rodney, The Bartender, whose wife, Baby, aspires to Boogie Woogie, ceaselessly and without much success ("happy she is the traveling salesman say, but Boogie Woogie she is not") studying the video tapes ("The Lessons") that Buddy takes around (to music stores). Rodney is philosophical, especially about Baby's talents, but skeptical about Boogie Woogie. And "now he's met his nemesis,...face to face". They talk.

Meanwhile, back in time (to the evening of the big day), Will and Ida, in The Living Room, solve the puzzle, perhaps even to the motive, but it's too late. Somewhere in Indiana, with the money hidden in the car (unknown to Gwyn, of course: "Gwyn's not guilty") and certain of their success, Ed and Gwyn and Dwayne and "D" have found a Justice of The Peace who will perform the ceremony ("I handle speedtraps, elopements, true signatures and the like"), and who recognizes in Gwyn something so urgent ("and why is the Bride-to-be so----uhn---what's the word?"), something so dramatic ---("She is a (p')monkey, Sir.") ---that he is transported somewhere in the past, to another ceremony, to another Bride-to-be ("Lucille", who speaks in tongues), to a confusion of time and place where other (famous) marriages are enacted: "Snowdrift", abandoned at the altar; and so forth. And while we pause to eat the wedding cake, his humble situation ("right off my bedroom is my office") is transformed before our very eyes, as it were, into The Church ("the church of the great light"). And we are satisfied.

Meanwhile, back in town, in The Backyard, a few friends and relatives have gathered, as usual in summer, to picnic, to celebrate the changing of the light at sundown. And watching from the doorway of her mother's house, Isolde counts the days.

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THE KITCHEN is a non-profit organization which presents the experimental work of visual, media, and performing artists. Since its founding in 1971, it has achieved an international reputation as a center for the avant-garde. In addition to its exhibitions and concert programs, it provides support services to its artistic community: commissions, publicity, touring, and video distribution. The Kitchen recently began producing television and radio programs by major figures of the avant-garde.



"The result is a work of rare elegance and emotional energy...a most powerful sense of personality.... deeply romantic, full of wonder and a sense of gentle absurdity. The last words of the night... were 'Dear George, what's going on? I'm not the same person that I used to be.' Those who let themselves open to Ashley's art can feel similarly transformed."

John Rockwell  
The New York Times  
January 8, 1978