

SARA (the smuggler)

The script (updated 2016).

Conceived and choreographed by Keith Hennessy

Written by Keith Hennessy & Sara Shelton Mann

Inspired by and modeled after Remy Charlip's *Growing Up In Public* (1984), a solo for Lucas Hoving, with permission from the estate of Remy Charlip.

- **Sara drawing on floor that is a wallⁱ**

Break tableⁱⁱ

- **Remy clearing danceⁱⁱⁱ**

- **(Early performance images)**

(stand) There's a picture of me standing on a tall ladder with a bucket of water ready to pour on anybody who passes by. In full cowboy regalia on a donkey.

Strips of orange and black crepe paper for Halloween.

Tying my dolls together and going to the top of the hill as if I was running away from home, everyday.

Then there's the mule.

Me in a big hat on a mule.

And rolling down hills naked in a raincoat.

I did that in college. That was the most fun of all.

And climbing electrical towers.

I don't have any pictures of that.

I spent most of my timing hiding under chairs.

I would practice disappearing.

And pretend that nobody could see me.

I used to hang out in boogey hollow until it got dark.

I climbed trees. I hid under bushes. I dared the bulls when crossing a field.

When the cars passed I would see if I could hit the ditch before I could be seen. (snap)

I ran.

- **(My name is:)**

(sit) I was born Sara Alice Mann,

Dec 17, 1943,

Nashville Tennessee.

My mother was shot when I was 2 and a half months old.
The only time I saw my father was on his death bed^{iv}.
I was passed around for a few years
and then around 4 or 5 I was adopted by my second cousins,
the Sheltons,
so I became Sara Alice Shelton.
I started making pieces as Sara Mann
when I went to Nova Scotia in the early 70s.
Then in San Francisco in 1979 I became Sara Shelton Mann.
Name change – relocation – name change – relocation,
it's always a process of trying to find me.

On Sundays I got to visit my real grandparents on the other side of town.
Big stone houses. Big yards. And swings.
I remember the smell of cigars, and dirty books, and alcohol
which I connected to the smells of my true family.
The family I lived with, the women went to church daily.
There was always a bible in front of them.
And the TV was always on.
They were called WASPS.
I refused to eat at the table
because our cook Ella^v was not allowed to sit with us.
I have no memory of physical touch,
no hugs, no love, no kisses,
except switches, switches on the legs.
I wore shorts to school and got kicked out
so my grandmother would pull out the big switch and chase me.
The highest level of aspiration for me was to take home economics,
become a secretary, find a nice man, and get married.
(stand) I've always felt half on the planet and half off.

• **I'm upset loop**

(A looped collage of actions/images from Evol, Oracle, Religare, Interims, childhood, today.^{vi})

• **(Franziska Boas)**

(sit) My first dance teacher was Franziska Boas^{vii},
at Shorter College in Rome Georgia.
It wasn't a normal dance class.
She taught kinesiology and improvisation.

For her, dance was therapy.
I spent most of my college time with a flask of scotch.
We'd sneak out of class and go on adventures to strange places.
The South is a strange place...

Franziska said, you could be a great dancer.
She told me to go study with Jose Limon, Louis Horst, and Martha Graham^{viii}.
So I did.
Then she said that if I could deal with the politics of dance
I should go to New York, dance for Nikolais, and become a professional.
So I did.
With only 500 bucks and the name of a person I could stay with for a week.
Only two years ago I found out that she had asked someone^{ix} to look after me.

The first time I saw Franziska was on a poster:
Wanted by the KKK.
In the picture she was with her dog Runa.
I didn't like people. I loved dogs.
When I saw her on campus I followed her into the gym
and up to the dance studio with the red curtains.
I didn't know that she taught dance.
I just saw her and I followed her.
With Franziska I found a place where you didn't have to talk.
I was scared of my own voice.
I didn't trust language.
Franziska drummed and we danced.

• **(Early sex, abortion)**

(stand at music stand)
When I was young there were five boys that lived about a mile away.
My only playmates were boys. I didn't know any little girls.
So I had to run faster, scream louder, jump higher.
Because they were always threatening me with rape.
I was 11, 12, or 13. I can't remember.

Then I got pregnant at 15.
They wanted a shotgun wedding but I refused to tell.
He was a senior. I didn't know anything.
I broke my cherry, had an orgasm, and got pregnant all at the same time.
That's a home run.

My sexual appetite was voracious
but it was always linked to getting pregnant.
Keith asked me, how many abortions have you had? I'm not telling.
For my first abortion, they took me to Alabama.
I can still see the white picket fence, the Buick, the dirt floor,
the black woman and her husband, a bottle of quinine and a coat hanger.
Another family took me in so I could finish high school.

I've had great sex
but not the kind where you feel loved without another woman waiting in the wings.
There's always been a shadow of being the bad girl,
the one the boys wouldn't marry,
and then there's the shadow of men who lie.

I would sneak out my window to go dance to live Black bands.
Two-step, improvising, learning tricks.
Dancing was evil, smoking was evil, alcohol was evil.
I went out and did all three as fast as I could. I was living in hell already.

At Shorter College I had my second abortion.
He got down on his knees and offered me a diamond ring.
That was after the abortion. He didn't have to do that.
I had a terrible fever. I thought they left me to die.
I was consumed by fire and I kept repeating this mantra
I am going to live. I am going to live. I am going to live.
There was a basketball player who raped a woman
in a classroom
and he didn't get kicked out of school but I did.
Franziska took me in.
She came to the South to work in the Civil Rights movement.
The KKK burnt a cross in our front yard.
I felt like I would die if I stayed in the south...
Shock has a rhythm to it.

• **(New York)**

S: Let's talk about New York... Keith?

K: Hi Sara. What did you learn from Martha Graham?

S: Not to step on people's backs.

K: From Louis Horst?

S: Rhythm is everything.

K: From Nikolais?

S: That motion is the engine for everything, for all creativity.

K: From Murray Louis?

S: Hey doll! Flamboyance. He only had eyes for the guys.

K: From Viola Farber?

S: How to fail.

K: From Merce?

S: There was nobody like him. He danced like a lion. But he had secrets that he didn't teach.

• **Nik remembering dance**

Keith: Sara. Find a space to stand. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to the senses. Let's go to New York. In the early 60s. On the stage of the Henry Street Playhouse. On Grand Street, in the lower east side. You're in rehearsal with Nik. Let your body remember the dancing...

• **(Nik – teaching)**

(walking) Being in class with Nik. It was terrifying. And absolutely ecstatic. Nik would stand at a big drum, working with his voice and the rhythm. I know he put us into trance. Nik taught from theory... Space – undercurve – overcurve moving from the chest – There was always a walking base - *And* a one, *And* a two... initiating on the off beats. When Nik was working on a new piece we felt like we were in the unknown, on the verge of some extraordinary moment, a discovery of an essential truth. And we would compete to see who would find it first.

We would go to the coffee shop to discuss Nikolais' ideas, tearing them apart. We would make pieces on each other. We were eccentric, excited and we were in love.

• **(Murray / Sara's 1st piece)**

(stand) Remy asked Lucas, so Keith asked me, about my favorite onstage memory.

I remember the state of emptiness.

I felt naked.

There was no difference between rehearsal and performance.

The piece was called Interims and it was 1966.

Dancing with Murray Louis in a quartet that I had to learn from video.

• **Brief 'dance' portraying or recalling the awareness and emptiness of Interims.**

My first piece^x.

Murray gave us a choice of making a dance about furniture, or a great painting, or about god.

I chose God.
I performed it at the world's fair in Montreal for thousands of people.
I channeled god. I became transparent.
I did this (stand profile, arm circle).
I did this (repeat gesture).

- **Falling dance**

(brief dance of what Sara teaches as falling up, the ascending spine in the momentum of a fall...)

- **(Contact Improv / Mangrove)**

(sit) Contact improvisation. Touch! I got to touch people and I didn't have to talk.
The ability to push and say no.

I realized that many women have no boundaries at all. I didn't.

Andrew Harwood and Helen Clark came to Halifax to perform.

I watched her roll around his shoulders and I went, "I'm in heaven, what is that?"

I took every workshop I could. I would fall and cry and fall and cry.

I met Mangrove at a workshop on Victoria Island.

It was called, The Cutting Edge of the Form.

I had a broken toe, so I wore boots.

Soon after I was in a relationship with Byron^{xi}, one of the five men in Mangrove, and they invited me to perform and teach with them in San Francisco.

Contact Improv became the metaphor for all of my work.

I began to see the application of somatics and consciousness to Contact^{xii}.

I became passionate about the study of energy in space,
the energy inside and around the body.

- **(Contraband)**

In 1985 I was rehearsing in Mariposa Studio, Project Artaud,
working with women and men on alternating days.

I had observed in the spiritual practice of Hameed Ali^{xiii}
a visionary model for making art.

And I wanted to start over.

I said I wasn't making a piece.

We made Evol. And Contraband was born.

Evol. The iron ball.

Love spelled backwards and the question, What is love?

I remember fighting with feathers, a suitcase of stones, a chair,

the table and the ax, singing, helicopters,

people making love by throwing themselves at each other through the air,

turning one body into all bodies.

Contraband was guided. It was meant to be.
I wanted a research group.
Interdisciplinary performance and spiritual practice,
text, singing, drumming, politics, visual images...
We did everything.
And I wanted a family.
My intention was always to make something filled with light
but the shadow would come up, right in our faces.

(music stand)

Contraband's second piece was called Religare^{xiv},
the hope of the impossible.
1986. The Gartland Pit. The corner of 16th and Valencia.
Where tenants had died from landlord arson.
I remember wearing gloves, and cleaning the grief as we were picking up glass, and
needles, and shit.
Crowds of people on the street looking down.
A vision of incredible darkness with light coming out of it.
The fire and the circle and the singing.
Like a village.
I got to be part of something bigger than me.

- (Brief hand dance)

I had a dream.
Of an energetic war between male and female
way up in the heavens.
My relationship with Jess^{xv} was manifested most clearly,
in a dance called The (Invisible) War^{xvi}.

- **Harmonica Solo**^{xvii}

(stand) In the middle of Evol, Mirabai, a south Indian poet, came to me...

- The Mira cycles. A seven year journey.
From Moscow to Mexico, Boston to Santa Fe,
from Tire Beach to the Bayview and back to the Mission.
By the end I didn't know if I was Mira or Sara,
or what had happened to this family.

Mira I was the marriage. Mira II was the break up.
Mira III was the death, the dissolution, and the rebirth through chaos.
A return to ordinary life.
Once again I thought I would disappear.
“Mira walks to the river by moonlight.
Her heart can lift mountains by beating”^{xviii}.

(stand)

Contraband.

I fell in love and I learned that I didn't know how to fight well or run a business.
I learned that your life, your body, your intuition, your story has a powerful place to live.
A group of people can create a vitality that resonates throughout the universe and beyond.
We naively thought we could heal. And I think we did.
It is hard work to care about each other.

- **(Zero Point/Tribes)**

After Contraband,

three years of working in different languages and aesthetics
to find the zero point.

I included this quote from Nietzsche in a program^{xix}:

There's nothing more difficult than leaving the tribe.

You'll be lonely, you'll be scared, and you'll be hungry.

No price is too high for the privilege of owning your own soul

- **Healing practices**

(Dowsing the audience)

This is a dowsing rod. I'm going to do a simple clearing of the space and everyone in it.
Don't worry, if you don't want it, you won't get it.

(Sara asks for a volunteer for an individual healing, to be a surrogate for the collective.

Volunteer sits center stage. Thought Form Removal^{xx}.)

- **(Money)**

(At music stand, sing) Money, honey, come to me. Money, honey, come to me.

(talk) Money. I work for a living and I need a job.

I don't wanna talk about money because too much self judgement comes in.

Sometimes I think I should only heal and not teach...

Money is very stressful.

I heard Jesse and Maria discussing: why is Sara not rich and famous?

I don't think the self-help thing works.

It's just a way to get your money.
And the web is full of it.
All of these healing trainings, and I have done a ton of them, just trying to heal me.
But I just love to study.
I have made so many mistakes.
Contraband, I should have gone bankrupt.
There was a \$60,000 debt and it took me 10 years to pay it off.
But I shouldn't have paid it.
It wasn't my debt.
I was like a little 5 year old, cowering in the corner of the room.
I made a mistake of hiring that asshole^{xxi}
and trusting him
and a board of his friends from the ballet
who pointed their fingers at me.
I was shaking like a leaf and feeling so bad.

You wanna learn how to give away your money, talk to Sara.
I am a victim, is there a tyrant in the house?
I hate the fucking government.
I hate the fucking insurance companies.
I feel trapped.
You know how they tell you, don't spend money for a year after someone dies?
Well no one told me that until it was too late.
I spent it all when my 2nd cousin died.
I spent it ripping apart my loft.
Money is evil. Money is dirty. We're not like those people,
like my brother on the other side of town.
The people who brought me up thought money was evil and they were poor as dirt.
My hands got slapped when I tried to touch it.
The other side of the family was wealthy.
Did they take me?
No they took the boy, my brother Charlie.
Don't get me wrong, I love Charlie.
And by the way I need a new computer, a new iphone,
a new bed, a new place to live.
It would be great if I had a year off to go through my loft
and clean out the archives.
I want a drawing table. I miss drawing.
But then I think, How are you going to make a living, Sara?
Follow your bliss and the money will follow?

How is that working for you?

Keith told me that my fee for these performances would be \$3000.

I told him I would spend it all on injections for my hip.

He cried.

The doctor says I need three.

I'm counting on one^{xxii}.

• **(Guillermo Gomez Peña)**

(sit) Working with Guillermo Gomez-Peña

I learned bliss and emptiness, again.

Performing in a diorama with Pocha Nostra was like being in the bardo,
bits of images and history floating through the visual field.

I played the cultural transvestite with a bottle of tequila,
a mariachi outfit, a mustache, a toilet, a rabbit, and guns.

People are throwing their desires at you.

Confusing the political, the racial, and erotic.

You change the color of skin and all hell breaks loose.

• **(Tea ceremony^{xxiii})**

Maestro. (go music) Hi y'all. How'r ya doin'? This is my favorite song, Ray Charles
singing America the Beautiful. I think we should all stand up. C'mon. Stand up. I don't
care if it takes all night. Ok, raise your right arm. Now sit down.

I made some tea, sassafrass tea. Heals what ails ya. It's good for your blood, thickens
your blood or thins your blood, and we all need blood now doncha?

• **(Solos)**

(stand) Since 2011 I have been working on a series of solos, The Eye of Leo.

Created through conversation.

Based on how one played as a child
and how that design creates a life.

I'm narrowing down from spectacle to a relationship with one person.

Without any agenda except to be with someone's consciousness.

Their job is to not be distracted. Allowing oneself to be seen.

Action as a practical job. Laughter and being a magician.

It's a spiritual journey without a map which means it's a puzzle
based on time and space

that requires absolute precision.

- **(Voice over/costume change, seen through scrim of turquoise silk)**

There are so many people and pieces, relationships and experiences that could be mentioned. How did I get here? Which stories to tell about Krissy Keefer and Lauren Elder? About Norman Rutherford and David Szlasa? And so many amazingly generous artists and collaborators? Craig, Dibz, Brooke, Andy, Nina, Brenda, Rinde, Calvin, Lauren, Keith, Jess, Benji, Jim, Norman, Richard, Gwen, Jules, Kim, Julie, Elaine, Karen, Nola, Jack, Julian, John, Mary, Lizzy, Peter, Shannon, Andrew, Kathleen, Albert, Brenton, David, Mim, Yannis, Leslie, Hana, Kira, Maria, George, Ramon, Yayoi, Shelly, Austin, Abby, Jose, Christine, Jorge, Sara, Rajendra, Emily, Patrick, Kristen, Jesse, Rachael, Anya, Matthew, Sherwood, Alex, Alice, Beth, Alia, Elizabeth and countless students and community choruses... If I forgot your name, please forgive me, you are here...

- (Sara walks into scrim. It falls to cover her. Stillness – hiding – meditating. Music is Contraband Mira 1, “I am” by Jules and Norman)

- My last lover said my skin was like leather.

Exhibit A (point to arm).

Exhibit B (turn to show back).

I love leather. I wear leather like an animal.

I prefer leather that is worn and burned into the fire of experience.

He no longer wants to touch me.

My skin is old, timely, ancient, and knows the mysteries.

It is not a decoration to be adorned by advertising.

I am old.

Now, who wants to join me in cultivating chi. Come on down.

- **Chi cultivation^{xxiv} class**

- **Chi solo dance improv**

- **(From crazy to dancing to thank you)**

I went crazy in NYC in my early 20s.

I could see laser colored lines in space that held up a building or a room.

I used to only sleep 3 nights a week.

My mother needed the other four. She wanted the view.

I only ate pistachios and listened to Bojangles.

Or was that when I only ate brown rice and scotch, my macrobiotic phase.

Paintings would start to vibrate and I could see the nature of the painter.

On the subway everything would fracture, break up, and sounds would echo, reverb.
I could walk down the street and see people's insides,
their emotions in living color coming right out of them.
It was too much. I had to shut it down.
I went to get help and they thought I was on drugs.
I didn't know what was going on. Give me an instruction kit.
Finally it took the form of a black widow spider. And I had to make a choice.
To go crazy or to stay on the planet in a way in which I could function.
I told my friend Emery^{xxv} that I needed a family
and he found a Puerto Rican family downtown and I lived in a room there.
One day I heard music and started dancing again.

On my 70th birthday
Keith asked me if I would perform this solo
modeled after the piece that Remy made for Keith's teacher Lucas
when Lucas turned 70.
I said yes.
Keith said that the only rule was that I was not allowed to get hurt.
After 2003 I never thought I'd perform again.

I'm still here.
I thank you and bow to all of you^{xxvi}.

- i Sara writing with chalk - Lotus 695 (2003), Sky (2005), Telios (2006), Eye of Leo (2011). Voice over texts from Sara's poetry and performance texts (90s/00s) assembled and composed by Norman Rutherford 2015. Sound score also includes a choral chant of a Kabir poem from Oracle, Contraband 1987, re-recorded by Rutherford (2015).
- ii Table break with hatchet from Contraband's Evol (1985).
- iii Clearing dance co-created by Sara and Remy Charlip for Contraband's Mira II (1992).
- iv Not precisely true. Sara saw him pass by in a car one day.
- v Ella was Black/African American.
- vi "I'm upset" from Nina Hart in Evol (1985). Silent scream from Oracle (1987). Black umbrella from Religare (1986/89). Arm gesture from Sara's first solo re: God (1968). White shirts have appeared in several works starting with a costume design by Leslie Seifers for Sky (2005).
- vii Franziska Boas, Sara's first dance teacher. Boas was a contemporary of Wigman and Isadora, her father was the anthropologist Franz Boas. See program bio. In the 30s and 40s Franziska ran an interracial dance studio in NYC. In the 50s Boas moved to the south to work in the Civil Rights movement and to teach dance.
- viii At ADF – American Dance Festival.
- ix The "someone" asked to look after Sara in NYC was Ruth Grauert, Nikolais' first dancer and stage director 1950s-70s.
- x Arm circle gesture, God, Sara Alice Mann (Montreal, 1968).
- xi Byron Brown, Mangrove dancer, Sara's husband/art partner, 1979-84.
- xii Body Mind Centering with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Ortho-bionomy with Bill Weintraub, Diamond Path with Hameed Ali, Pranic healing, Energy medicine and the Reconnection with Eric Pearl, Spiritual massage with Maria Sauer Holloman...
- xiii A.H. Almaas is the pen name of A. Hameed Ali, creator of the Diamond Approach and spiritual head of the Ridhwan School where Sara studied for some years in the 80s.
- xiv Religare – to bind back to source
- xv Jess Curtis, Contraband, Sara's boyfriend/art partner, 1985-92.
- xvi The (Invisible) War, by Sara Shelton Mann & Jess Curtis, music by Rinde Eckert and then additional live music by Jules Beckman, and a brief cameo performance by Keith Hennessy (1987).
- xvii Harmonica dance, Mira 1, Contraband (1990).
- xviii From a stomping chant in Contraband's Mira I (1990), using text from a poem by Mirabai (active 1516-1546), translation by Robert Bly in Mirabai Versions (Red Ozier Press. 1980.)
- xix Tribes (Potsdam 2008?, YBCA 2009-10?). This is not the precise citation.
- xx Thought form removal, as taught by Maria Lucia Sauer Holloman.
- xxi Joe Touhy
- xxii Sara only received one of these injections. After years of relentless pain and attempts to heal, and soon after the premier of Sara (the smuggler), Sara had a hip replacement and is now living/dancing with an expanding range of pain free movement.
- xxiii Excerpt from America the beautiful / Tea ceremony by Sara Shelton Mann, performed in collaboration with Pocha Nostra (1998-2000).
- xxiv Chi cultivation as learned from Dr. Tan.
- xxv Emery Hermans danced with Nikolais in the 1960s.
- xxvi Closing lines are a direct quote from Growing Up In Public by Remy Charlip (1984).