

## SARA

My music and religion are deeply intertwined within my soul. My life would have no meaning without music and without God, without spirit, without a daily soulful prayer to the Creator.

As a young child I played piano, Mozart symphonies and other classics, with lessons from a young Hungarian refugee woman. She was a conservative Jew, and her deeply ingrained Judaism left a powerful mark upon me. She entered my world from a different continent, country, language, outlook, and life view, forcing me to acknowledge and respect people of profound difference. My own Catholic parents, did not live their religion that way, eventually leaving the Church when I was 6 years old.

There was also another facet of my life that I was certain. That I was female. It was sure to me as a youngster, as sure as my name and my music, and as sure as the profound power of God beating within my heart. All those things were not felt, nor sensed, and certainly never learned. They just were. I was made by God to be female, and to be a musician.

Around the age of four, my mother had to process awkward moments with me often, expressing interest in girls' clothes and in being pretty. Upon entering kindergarten however, the gender walls rose higher than I could fathom or climb, and I was made to learn that most certainly I was a boy.

Thirty years later, tired as I lay my heavy body down on a large rock in Central Park, tired of a life of denial, of psychotherapy and self-hatred, a life of insecurity, nearly ended several times in an overdose of booze and drugs, I heard, as surely as the sound of a cicada on a summer evening, the voice of God within.

“Do you want to go there?” God asked me, asking if I had the desire, the fortitude, and the determination to make the journey across the gender divide. “Yes, God, I need to go there,” I replied.

In the tumultuous two and a half years that followed, I changed my name, wardrobe, hair, hormonal make-up and way of living. Along the way, I lost friends, lovers, concert dates, and my teaching job. I never wavered however in my newfound determination. It was a journey made not alone but with God, who had asked me to follow the map.

In the midst of everything, I moved to the Bronx in New York, directly across the street from the beautiful St. Philip Neri Catholic Church and school.

I began to attend Mass, finding comfort in the rituals and Bible readings, and the welcoming and beautiful voice of the assistant pastor. In time I mustered enough courage for a deeply needed first confession, not knowing how, but doing my best. “You do not need my forgiveness,” Father said, “you have spoken to God and He hears you, and God has forgiven you already, a long time ago.”

I recounted my entire life, of not fitting into the world around me, a gender transition having destroyed my musical career, and my attempted suicides. “But your body, too, is not even yours,” Father said. “It too, is a work of God. Your body is a temple of God, and you must not destroy it.”

The mercy of God, the love of Jesus and Mary, erupted within my heart at Father’s words, I shall never forget. A lifetime of guilt, confusion, self-hatred, cross-dressing, and sexual confusion, suddenly appeared to me. I was human, loved by God, and becoming whole. I had been shown mercy of an order beyond words.

I began to take Catholic classes, and within a year was ready for my First Communion. I wore a beautiful white dress, and had never looked and felt more fully complete, as a person, as a woman, as a follower of Christ and the Catholic faith.

I am a Catholic, perhaps one that our Pope and Bishops do not acknowledge or accept, but it is to the words and teachings of Jesus that I look for guidance, and in so doing identify myself as Catholic. I identify as a woman, and a musician, essential truths, grateful for who I am, and to be of the body and blood of Christ, blessed and loved. In my person and music, may I share and encourage that love in all whom I come to know.