

# A Day in the Life at MacDowell Colony



Composer Dr. Andrea Clearfield in front of the Irving Fine studio during the summer of 2011.

Dr. Andrea Clearfield, an SAI Honorary Member and member of the SAI Composers Bureau, is an award-winning composer of music for orchestra, opera, chorus, chamber ensembles, dance, film, and multi-media collaborations. She received a D.M.A. in Composition from Temple University, where she studied with Maurice Wright, and received an M.M. in Piano from The University of the Arts, where she studied with Susan Starr and served from 1986-2011 on the composition faculty. Active as a pianist, she has performed with numerous groups, including the Court of the Dalai Lama and has been the pianist in the contemporary music ensemble *Relâche* since 1990.

Her works are performed widely in the U.S. and abroad, and her music is published by Boosey & Hawkes and G. Schirmer, to name a few. Among her 140 works are ten cantatas, including one commissioned and premiered by The Philadelphia Orchestra. Her 2012 cantata, *Tse Go La* (At the threshold of this life), for double chorus, chamber orchestra, and electronics, co-commissioned by the Mendelssohn Club and the Pennsylvania Girlchoir, was inspired by her treks documenting Tibetan music in a restricted northern Himalayan region of Nepal.

It was this piece that she worked on while staying at SAI's Pan Cottage at The MacDowell

Colony in 2011, one of five times that she has been a Fellow there. We caught up with Dr. Clearfield recently, to hear about her experiences at MacDowell, her impression of Pan's Cottage, and her work while there as a Fellow.

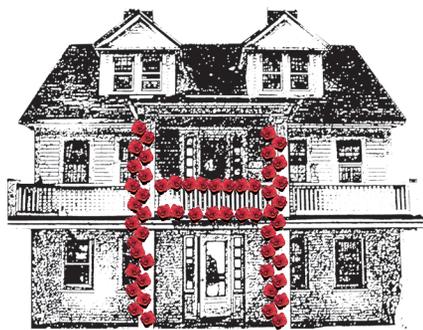
## What is your typical schedule while a composer resident at MacDowell Colony?

"I have long been a "night owl". This pattern may be attributed to so many late night concerts or it might very well be the romantic allure of what (at the time) feels like unending and expansive solitary hours to work. At MacDowell I generally sleep in, stop at Colony Hall for coffee and, if I'm lucky, find breakfast leftovers (where I gladly replace my mainly gluten-free diet with famous MacDowell home baked goods), take a walk along the woody paths, write in my journal, and do some organizational things. After enjoying a tasty lunch (love the soups) delivered to my studio in the legendary picnic basket by beloved longtime staff member Blake, I will begin composing, break for afternoon yoga practice, have dinner in Colony Hall with the other fellows, and continue composing until about 2:00am. If artists are presenting their work in the evening, I'll often attend as I am interested in, and stimulated by, what my colleagues are creating in their different media."

## What do you remember of the accommodations at Pan's Cottage?

"I was at Pan's Cottage during the summer of 2011. My studio was Irving Fine. Because I like to work at night, I would often come back quite late to Pan's (which was usually very quiet). What I remember most about my bedroom in Pan's was the light. The room was a magical space at the top of the stairs that had a special lightness to it, with a lovely window looking out into the green. It was small, personal, and the perfect "womb" that I craved after hours of composing, researching, improvising, problem solving, and listening.

I am so grateful to SAI for its generous and visionary role in building and maintaining the lovely Pan's Cottage almost 100 years ago and caring for Edward MacDowell's historic Music Room at Hillcrest. One of my favorite evenings at MacDowell is when Residency Director David Macey welcomes the Fellows to Hillcrest to watch the old MacDowell documentary in the Music Room. Always a special night, we feel a palpable connection to Edward MacDowell and his music, decades of artists envisioning, exploring, manifesting there, and to Marian MacDowell for her tireless efforts in keeping MacDowell going, even during times of great duress. I feel such admiration for Marian and for other great women who have had seminal roles in building colonies



Partnering with the McDowell colony to conduct a major renovation of Pan's Cottage, we are building a "virtual rose garden" by placing a red rose on the cottage drawing above for every \$1,000 raised. We are well on our way to meeting the \$100,000 goal by June 30, 2018, but still need your help.

What can you do to support the Pan's Cottage Campaign efforts?

- Hold chapter fundraisers – photos of chapters that donate will appear on the national website;
- Match pledges made by Regional or Province Officers;
- Donate an individual minimum gift of \$25, matching Delta Chapter's 1916 request to the National Convention;
- Speak about the MacDowell Colony and Pan's Cottage at Province Days;
- Read quarterly *PAN PIPES* for Pan's Cottage Campaign articles.

Thank you for helping  
Sigma Alpha Iota Philanthropies make  
the Pan's Cottage Campaign a success!

of artists including Kristina Trask (Yaddo) and Helen Wurlitzer (Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico). I feel privileged to have been a MacDowell Fellow 5 times, and I never tire of this ritual at Hillcrest - sitting in this historic room with fellow Fellows, watching the old movie, humbled (and sometimes teary-eyed) as we realize that we are part of a century old lineage of creators. Very moving."

### What project were you working on while residing at Pan's Cottage?

"When in Pan's Cottage/Irving Fine during the summer of 2011, I was just beginning a piece that would become for me a major turning point

in my work. I had returned from my second trek to a remote area in the northern Nepalese Himalayas to record Tibetan melodies with an anthropologist that had not previously been documented. The region, Lo Monthang, Nepal, is close to the border of Tibet and one of the last remaining enclaves of traditional Tibetan culture. At MacDowell, I was listening to the audio of the 100+ recordings that we had made, and with permission from the performers, transcribing some of them into western notation. It was not an easy task.

Some rhythms were difficult to identify, some melodies seemed like microtonal renderings of an ever-varying scale, some words could not be translated, and some vocal ornaments were perplexing even to the scholars. I reached out to my composer colleagues at MacDowell who listened and gave insightful feedback. That summer I succeeded in transcribing seven of the songs and started to sketch a large scale cantata, *Tse Go La* (At the threshold of this life). The cantata was sung in the region's Mustangi dialect of Tibetan with two movements in English to poetry by anthropologist and writer Dr. Sienna Craig. *Tse Go La* cantata is on the theme of the life cycle, rites of passage, and threshold moments. It is scored for double chorus (SATB/SSA), electronics, and chamber orchestra.

I was developing a new tonal, rhythmic, and textural language in the voices and orchestra, as well as exploring the idea of "threshold" or "transition" in music. I also was experimenting with a merging between electronic sound created by treating my field recordings digitally in the context of the large ensemble. At MacDowell I also created the overarching structure for the 7 movement work and wrote its centerpiece: *Tse Go La (III)* on young love where a boy meets the girl that he knows will be his destiny, and he likens her to a vast lake, a mountain pasture, a flower. I also began composing *Shar Ki Ri (II)* which is performed by the Girlchoir, advising youth to look not to the east where the sun has already risen, but rather to the west where the sun has not yet set to build a meaningful life. Here is a link to a three minute interview with original audio and video from the treks: [youtube.com/watch?v=9a\\_AJQ7Kh0w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9a_AJQ7Kh0w)

I remember each day at MacDowell that summer of 2011 spending time contemplating on what needed to be conveyed in this large scale piece. I was not only pushing the boundaries of my own work but was inspired by a vision of singers of all ages and backgrounds learning about this ancient and spiritually rich, endangered horse culture through music.

There were many challenges involved: choosing the songs, identifying the common threads, creating the "seed" musical materials that would lend themselves to both cohesiveness and contrast, working on a choral friendly Tibetan transliteration and pronunciation key, exploring harmonic and textural layers to support the original melodies while keeping them intact, and always treading gently with respect. Returning to Pan's Cottage in the evening provided the gentle tranquility needed for rest and rejuvenation before the next day's work."

### What has drawn you to keep returning to Peterborough?

"I love everything about MacDowell: the beautiful natural setting with lots of paths to walk and think, wonderful studios tucked away in the forest, the great care of the staff to provide artists with a place that can be free from the stresses and distractions of the outside world, the exceptional community of gifted artists. I am inspired by the community, learning from the creative process, language and aesthetic choices that other artists make and always leave with new friends and collaborators. A dreaming space for art to be manifest, MacDowell is no doubt a bit of heaven."

Dr. Clearfield's 2011 fellowship at MacDowell paved the way for a new body of work, including her recent *Rabsong Shar* (The Eastern Room of the Palace) for soprano and chamber orchestra, commissioned by the University of Arkansas, inspired by the power of music to tell a story of a culture, and even help preserve an endangered language. She continues to be involved with the documentation project as well as an initiative to help preserve the Mustangi dialect. The *Tse Go La* cantata set her on the journey to compose her first opera, *MILA* on the venerated Tibetan yogi Milarepa, who lived in the Himalayas in the 11th Century. Clearfield returned to MacDowell in the summer of 2014 to work on the opera and is currently completing the orchestration. The opera is set to libretto by NYC writers Jean-Claude van Itallie and Lois Walden, commissioned by Gene Kaufman and Terry Eder, to be directed by Kevin Newbury.

Now celebrating its 30th year, Dr. Clearfield is also the founder and host of the award-winning Salon, featuring contemporary, classical, jazz, electronic, multimedia and world music. The performance series was winner of Philadelphia Magazine's 2008 "Best of Philadelphia" award. She is also curating and hosting Salon concerts around the country and you can read more at [andreaclearfield.com](http://andreaclearfield.com).