

Yaddo

S P R I N G / S U M M E R N E W S 2 0 1 5



The Luxury of Silence

Quiet has been greatly on our minds of late. As we get to work on a flurry of much-needed new construction and restoration projects, it's a challenge but also a clear necessity, to reiterate our commitment to our basic mission. Our Board Co-Chairs A.M. Homes and Susan Unterberg recently took an opportunity to refocus attention on just that, writing: "Yaddo is a place of retreat." Their reminder coincided with an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* by Matthew Crawford, in which he said that "silence makes it

I had a spiritual director once who said to me that God's first language was silence. As a priest and poet, I am often trying to get back to that first language: to conjugate, memorize, practice it with fluency. It is a challenge. Our world is busy, and with speed comes noise. And with noise, impatience. Blind-copying. Reply all. Ring tones going off during poetry readings and sermons. Silence. Where to find it?

Priesting and poetry-making are antiquated career choices, like becoming a book-binder. Yet I'd have it no other way. Give me the smell of bookshops. Give me the last career to have a uniform.

I was invited to come to Yaddo for the first time in February 2014, at the conclusion of a teaching ministry at an all-girl orphanage in Pedro Sula, Honduras, called Our Little Roses. I didn't realize that February was perhaps the most unpopular month. Half the place is shut. There are no cocktail parties in short-shorts, nor martini glasses clinking. Instead, thermal underwear and practical boots.

Honduras, I would come to see, had changed me for all time. The girls in the orphanage, to whom I was supposed to

possible to think." The solitude that Yaddo exists to provide has perhaps never been more urgently needed than it is now in a world where it's hard to disconnect, harder still to find a haven for thinking, experimenting, imagining.

We asked Spencer Reece, Episcopal priest and poet, an artist in residence at Yaddo in February 2014, for his thoughts on silence. His collection *The Road to Emmaus*, longlisted for the National Book Award, is rife with silences,

teach poetry and "give" a voice, had given me courage, given me a stronger voice. It would take me time to see this. But at Yaddo I began to feel it.

Nearly everything I worked on that month I threw away. I have been called a slow worker. Some of the slowness came by way of rejection. Rejected for fifteen years, two hundred and fifty times with my first book, made me rich in slowness. Humbled me. Was middle-aged when I was published. A certain silence tutored me. The second book came eleven years later. More silence. Now I was working on an anthology of poems by abandoned and abused girls. It was to be accompanied by my spiritual autobiography. Rejections have rivaled the years with my first book. My 24,000 words withered to 1,000. In the end, memoir utterly repelled me, too much "me" in a story that, as a priest, has been defined by "we." Silence, hammered by rejection, has distilled my efforts. Silence doubled my clarity. My Christ knew this.

All I am trying to do is listen to God. Asking to be led. Still my will is mighty. A day of my will, I assure you, is not pretty. Still I have those days. Yaddo helped

continues on page 2



BEENA KAMILANI

mostly when people are listening to each other. And, though it's set in the recent past, the Emmaus story itself, of course, comes out of a world many times quieter than our own.

A Warm Welcome

We are pleased to announce that Ann Chen and Deborah Berke have been elected to Membership of the Corporation.

Chen currently advises a group of nonprofits on a pro-bono basis, primarily education and arts-related organizations in the San Francisco Bay area. Previously, she worked for 22 years at Bain & Company, where she oversaw consumer products and retail



Deborah Berke

Ann Chen

practice in Greater China from the company's Hong Kong office, before shifting her focus to the company's nonprofit division. She moved to San Francisco in 2014. She is a graduate of Princeton University and the Harvard Business School.

continues on page 3

SILENCE *continued from front cover*

me return to silence where the chances are greater for me and my work to be governed by God's will. In the mysterious work of poem-making, the more silence, the more I track the unsayable, the big game of poetry. Blind crazy art. Did ever an art contain more cluelessness than poetry?

One of my fellow writers at Yaddo let me into West House, a smaller wooden structure behind the large stone mansion. We went up a flight of stairs, Tiffany glass and antiques all around. So different from my apartment in San Pedro, murder capital of the world. Then we went up a set of thirteen white steps that turned in the middle to the garret studio that Sylvia Plath had once used. I could still hear my students laughing and cheering, playing soccer on their cement court, while I lay down my books

and laptop. I could still hear them laughing as I put Diana Ross on the broken boom box and we all danced to learn English, singing at the top of our lungs, "Stop! In the Name of Love!" "We love you!" those teenagers had said to me one day. And I had whispered back, "I love you, too."

Married to Ted Hughes, Plath was happy and in love in that studio; they returned to England shortly after her stay. The walls of the studio were cream white. The ceiling low. My head brushed the ceiling. A giant library table took up most of the room and had wooden wedges under the legs to keep it from tilting. The room was the size of a funicular. Indeed, the floor sloped as if the room listed, ascending somewhere. I looked out at the clean white snow. The enormous pines were covered with snow, wrinkling them up like an untidy choir in albs. A bright whiteness brightened that room. I had four mullioned windows and a skylight. The skylight was an elevated see-through birdhouse contraption with strange metal pulleys. A glass dollhouse with its insides removed. White light. Light that blinded. Bright light. Light filled the room every day. Light on the keyboard. Snow melting on

my boots. Particles of snow drifted down like the static from the black and white '60s TVs of my childhood.

Plath was an early fascination for me. The violent laceration of self and unleashing of anger, leading to her suicide at the age of



Spencer Reece with children of Our Little Roses orphanage in Pedro Sula, Honduras. (Photo by Diana Frade)

thirty, spoke to my young suffering. *Ariel* goes for broke. It still captivates me. But as time passes, regarding her subject matter, my interest is moving away from damage and onto something else. What? Peace?

Henry James wrote that art makes life. *Ariel* made her life, yes, yet her life also made *Ariel*. Or her death. In my case, the abandoned and abused girls, whose poems I was hoping to publish in Spanish and English, were altering me as poet and priest. There was such hope in those girls, called *desechables* (which refers to disposable containers, and is slang for "orphan"), despite their appalling histories. The suicide Plath argued for so convincingly now seemed unthinkable to me, transformed by my time with those girls, much of it spent in silence, when I wasn't teaching them. Was that faith? A faith brought to me by the girls? Through some kind of unmerited grace? Had they made my faith?

Sitting in Plath's Yaddo garret, the twelve love poems by the girls on the desk in front of me, thinking of Plath and London – her pipes frozen, devastated by the infidelity of her husband, bringing her young children each a pitcher of milk and a plate of cookies

as they slept, opening their window, shutting their door and then taping it shut, proceeding to her kitchen, stuffing the tea towels under the door, placing her head despondently into the oven, the gas knocking her out – was it crazy to think she was spurring me on in the

silence? One brilliant poet encouraging the voices of the twelve voices on the table? The fiftieth anniversary of her death fell the day I was finishing my work there: February 11, 1963.

Snow kept falling. Snow. And more snow. The white Yaddo lawns sparkled with snow crystals, SOS mirrors flashing. Every night, for one month, I put on my winter coat, boots, hat, gloves, scarf. I headed to dinner with the other artists to hear what they had done that day. In the silence of my days there I could hear the voices of the girls I taught. I started to hear a bigger

voice. I was being pulled forward like a clock's hand. The February Saratoga moon made my shadow long. Me and my long shadow a black clock hand ticking against the vast face of iced snow, smooth as a clock's face.

I left Yaddo and moved on by fall to my work as the secretary for the bishop of the Spanish Episcopal Church in Madrid, Spain where I write you now. We are in Lent. This past Sunday we read out the Gospel of John, chapter 7, where Christ says his time has not yet come. In order for Christ to understand his timing he had to be in silence. And for silence, he needed boundaries.

One of my favorite images of him is in Mark, chapter 4, where Jesus speaks to the crowd from the shore, but because there are so many, he gets in a boat to create a little distance. He makes a boundary. Like Simon on his pillar for forty years, Julian of Norwich in her cell, Emily Dickinson in her bedroom, Christ needed boundaries. Yaddo gave me a pillar, a boat, a cell, a bedroom, a boundary. The more silence I accrue the clearer the sound I make. No telling when the time is right. But I will know it by the silence surrounding it.

– Spencer Reece

OUT AND ABOUT

Over the May 15 weekend, Yaddo board members and other supporters travelled to Louisville, Kentucky, to take in a full schedule of art and culture. The trip was coordinated by Nana Lampton.



TOP: Kentucky Opera conductor Roger Zahab, librettist Barbara Grecki and composer Daron Hagen enjoy Nana Lampton's hospitality before the performance of *A Woman in Morocco*. **ABOVE:** Margo Viscusi and Don and Genie Rice visit with Louisville native Edith Bingham.



Yaddo President Elaina Richardson and Brooklyn Academy of Music Vice President for Development William Lynch (shown above) were center stage on February 23, at an event organized by the Capital Region Creative Economy Project. Richardson said that government and civic leaders increasingly recognize that vibrant cultural and historical sites are essential to economic growth. Yaddo purchases most of the goods and services necessary to operations, from food to fuel to building supplies, through local vendors.

Highlights included the premiere of Daron Hagen's opera *A Woman in Morocco* and visits to two outstanding private collections.

The Reverend Al Shands accompanied the group on a tour of his estate, with site-specific works by Maya Lin, Cy Twombly, and Judy Pfaff. Then, at Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown's exquisite Woodland Farm, 21c Museum curator Alice Gray Stites led a tour of the house, which holds works by Christian Schoeler, Bill Viola, Vik Muniz, and many others.

Friday Night, Brought to You by Yaddo

Not sure what to do this weekend? The plays, musicals, TV shows, books, and more produced by Yaddo Artists can keep you occupied for days. Never be bored again!

Craig Lucas is the writing talent behind one of Broadway's hottest tickets—*An American in Paris*, which *New York Times* critic Charles Isherwood praises as “gorgeously danced — and just plain gorgeous.” More Downtown? The Barrow Street Theater has revived Annie Baker's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *The Flick*. Dee Rees makes her mark on prestige television with *Bessie*, starring Queen Latifah, on HBO. Kate Walbert's novel *The Sunken Cathedral* explores the transformation of Chelsea as a superstorm bears down. Brad Gooch, biographer of Flannery O'Connor, switches genres to



remember the '80s in *Smash Cut*. In Noah Baumbach's *While We're Young*, Gen Xers make friends with millennials. Joseph Keckler and Eisa Davis perform in *Preludes* at Lincoln Center, about the demons in Sergei Rachmaninoff's head. The textile renaissance

is still going strong: Polly Apfelbaum is in *Pathmakers: Women in Art, Craft and Design, Midcentury and Today*, at the Museum of Art and Design. And see works by Yaddo Artists Jacob Lawrence and Amy Sillman in *America Is Hard to See* at the newly-reopened Whitney.

A WARM WELCOME

continued from front cover

Berke is the founding partner of Deborah Berke Partners, an architecture and design firm based in New York. Numerous art and cultural facilities, including Bard College's Conservatory of Music and the Marianne Boesky Gallery, are included in the firm's wide-ranging portfolio. Berke was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and the City University of New York. She has been the recipient of many prizes, including the first Berkeley-Rupp Architecture Professorship and Prize by the University of California, Berkeley, in 2012. She has taught architecture at the Yale School of Architecture since 1987.



Yaddo

P.O. Box 395
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SARATOGA SPGS, NY
PERMIT NO. 52

NEWS

MUCH-NEEDED RESTORATION of the Mansion is another step closer to becoming a reality. The 2015-16 State Budget includes \$250,000 for repairs to the 122 year-old building, as part of the State Aid to Localities Budget. State Senator Kathleen Marchione, who advocated for the appropriation, called Yaddo “an integral, vital and celebrated part of our Saratoga Springs community.” The grant follows an original \$250,000 earmarked for the Mansion in 2014-2015. The foundation, which has shifted over the years, and the slate-and-copper roof, are among the highest priorities.

IN APRIL, WE BROKE GROUND on our five new live-work studios; crews have cleared trees for the roads and dwellings, and are presently laying pipes. [The photo above right gives you a sneak peek of our progress. It shows the horseshoe-shaped loop to the studios that will be situated on the ridge overlooking the ponds.] Designed by the Phinney Design Group of Saratoga Springs,



the studios will be climate-controlled and able to accommodate guests year-round. Two will be general purpose, two will be for composers, and one will be for visual arts. They are scheduled to open in early spring 2016. Funds raised entirely from Yaddo artists are underwriting the construction of one studio.

WE RECENTLY RECEIVED a preliminary report on developing outreach to

underrepresented and underserved populations of artists, prepared by Kemi Ilesanmi, executive director of the Laundromat Project, a community-based arts organization in New York. Ilesanmi conducted site visits to Yaddo and interviews with staff, artists in residence, and board members, as well as staff at peer institutions, to provide recommendations for a sustainable program of engagement. The report was made possible thanks to funding from the Hearst Foundation.