

Tuesday Musical: marriage and an octopus

by Mike Telin



What do marriage and an octopus have in common? They both served as inspirations for Gregg Kallor's new work for string octet. On Wednesday, October 30 at 7:30 pm at E.J. Thomas Hall, Tuesday Musical will present "October Octets" featuring the Dover and Escher String Quartets. The program will include the premiere of Kallor's *String Octet* as well as Shostakovich's *Two Pieces for String Octet*, Op. 11, and Enescu's *Octet for Strings in C*, Op. 7. A conversation with the musicians will be held in the Flying Balcony Club beginning at 6:30 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

First, the marriages. Kallor's new work will bring together two brilliant string quartets. That's a marriage of a sort. But there's more — Dover violist Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt and Escher cellist Brook Speltz are in fact married. And when composing his *String Octet*, marriage was at the forefront of Kallor's thoughts. "I started writing it in the late winter of last year," the composer said during a recent interview. "But I had proposed to my wife in November, so marriage was very much on my mind." That marriage took place in September.

Second, the octopus. "My wife has this thing for octopuses, and we're dealing with eight musicians. It wasn't a conscious decision but this was all floating around in my head when I was writing the piece."

Kallor said that his wife's interest in the eight-limbed mollusk was fueled by a visit to their neighborhood bookstore. "One day she was browsing and near the counter she ran across this book called [The Soul of an Octopus](#). She bought it and immediately plowed

through the whole thing. Since then we've spent a fair amount of time in search of octopuses."

One search happened while the couple was in Seattle for the premiere of a new piece by Kallor. "We visited the Seattle Aquarium to see a Giant Pacific Octopus. We actually visited it twice." Kallor was taken by how all eight arms operate independently, changing color to express mood, and changing texture to mimic their surroundings — qualities that can also be found in a piece of music.

In his program notes Kallor writes:

A string octet is the octopus of chamber music: eight musicians breathing and playing together as a single entity, sublimating individual experience into combined expressive purpose. That's what I wanted to explore in this composition for octet.

Although Kallor said that he sketched many musical ideas, the two movements he chose for Wednesday's premiere embody the idea of celebrating the individuality of the eight musicians and their union as a single, expressive ensemble.

"It's important to have the musical dialogue involve all of the musicians — as well as different groupings — in a way that integrates everyone," he said. "I wanted to have mini-conversations within the larger conversation." Both movements combined are roughly twelve minutes in length. He described the first as "a burst of energy," and the second as "very gentle, tranquil, and loving."

How much discussion did the composer have with the musicians? "None," he said. "This is highly unusual for me. I like to write for specific people — I like having the back and forth, and trying things out. But because the Dover and the Escher are on the road so much, and given the short amount of time, it was just impossible."

Because Kallor is Tuesday Musical's Composer-in-Residence and the Escher are the Quartet-in-Residence, they have had the opportunity to get to know each other. "We've had several rounds of drinks," he said. "And I've heard the Dover in performance a few times but I haven't been able to get to know them, so I am looking forward to this week."

The composer said he is very grateful to Jarrod Hartzler, the recently departed Executive Director of Tuesday Musical, for making this commission a reality. "This is my first string octet and you can't find any better quartets than these. How lucky am I? I get to start at the top."

Wednesday's concert continues the partnership between Tuesday Musical and the [Autism Society of Greater Akron](#). For details about how people on the autism spectrum or with other disabilities, and their families, can obtain free or reduced-price tickets, click [here](#).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 28, 2019.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)