Kultur Festival features music, arts

By David A. Schwartz, Staff Writer

The Kultur Festival is back. The annual celebration of Jewish music and arts will begin Saturday and run through March 11 at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

The Klezmer Company Orchestra’s “Roots, Rhythm and Soul” concert on March 4 will highlight the eight-day program.

Other events include “Songs of Love from the Holocaust” and the American Jewish Theater’s reading of the play “The Gospel According to Jerry.”

“Roots, Rhythm and Soul” will kick off the Klezmer Company Orchestra’s 15th season with director Aaron Kula’s 25-piece orchestra performing seven songs.

Maestro Aaron Kula will lead the Klezmer Company Orchestra in its “Roots, Rhythm and Soul” concert on March 4 as part of the Kultur Festival at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

Submitted photo from the new “Klezmerology” CD. Almost two-dozen songs will be performed by KCO and guest artists.

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Kula’s compositions were adapted from songs and folk music and are influenced by American and Latin Jazz, swing and Negro spirituals.

Three pieces in the concert are songs that Kula’s father, Cantor Morton Kula who passed away in September, listened to and sang.

A reworked version of “Shabbat Menucha/Sabbath Day of Rest” will be performed in English by West Palm Beach tenor Daniel Cochran and in Hebrew by Cantor Mark Kula, the director’s brother.

Mark Kula will sing along with a 1984 recording by his father. The Klezmer Company Orchestra and Cochran will join in midway through the song.

Cochran will also sing “Nigun El Melech” and will later be accompanied by an African American quartet when he performs the Negro spiritual “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?”

The full Klezmer Company Orchestra will accompany its violinist Randi Fishenfeld in a newly discovered “Hungarian Csardas.” “It’s going to be a show-stopper,” Aaron Kula said.

Cantors Elliott Dicker of Beth Ami Congregation in Boca Raton and Bill Lieberman of B’nai Aviv Synagogue in West Palm Beach are each set to perform eight songs as part of the program “Songs of Love from the Holocaust” at 2 p.m. on March 5 at FAU’s Wimberly Library.

The songs are about more than romantic love, Dicker said, explaining that they are about “love of your faith, love of people, love of town, love of children and love of freedom.”

Dicker said he accepted the challenge of finding material for each category, going back to songs he learned as a student at the Hebrew Union College School of Sacred Music.

One song, “Babi Yar,” has had a lasting effect, Dicker said. “The first time I heard the song, tears kept on flowing. I had to stop singing.”

Lieberman said he selected four works by Lazar Weiner or Abraham Binder and a few folk songs for the nostalgic feelings they invoke.

The cantors will conclude the program with a duet of “Mein Shtetele Belz,” a song from the Yiddish theater that was written by Jacob Jacobs and Alexander Olshansky. Jacobs wrote the lyrics for the popular “Bei Meir Bist Du Schon.”

The staged play “The Gospel According to Jerry” will be performed by the American Jewish Theater at 7 p.m. on March 5 at the Wimberly Library.

The play, written by Richard Krevelin and Rabbi Irwin Kula, Aaron Kula’s brother, is about a divorced rabbi from New York City who is experiencing a mid-life crisis. Rabbi Jerry Silver and an African American gospel singer meet at an Overeaters Anonymous workshop and become friends.

“The funny and poignant play explores the Jewish-African American relationship with stereotypes and spirituality,” Aaron Kula said.

“It’s a very beautiful play. It’s different,” said Lela Elam, the actress from Deerfield Beach who portrays the gospel singer. The play is about the human connection, Elam said. “We forget that we really are all the same.”

Other programs — all at FAU’s Wimberly Library — include the 7 p.m. March 3 screening of the film “Making Trouble;” Jewish storytelling with “Bubbe Mayes” at 2 p.m. on March 7; “Reuben Hoch & the Chassidic Jazz Project” at 7 p.m. on March 8; and “Sephardic Soul,” Hebrew book arts: “The Quilting Path” at 2 p.m. on March 9.

The Joe Elias Memorial Concert featuring Ladino Songs with Fiery Jagoda at 2 p.m. on March 11 at the Barry and Florence Friedberg Lifelong Learning Center on the FAU campus will conclude the Kultur Festival.