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RECOGNITION FOR
KLEZMER COMPANY
ORCHESTRA

By Skip Sheffield
STAFF WRITER

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Aaron Kula came to FAU 11 years ago and promptly went to work forming the Klezmer Company Orchestra with a mission to revitalize, perform and preserve printed music of FAU Libraries’ vast Music Archives. The group made its debut in 1997. In 2003 Kula was appointed director of music collections and performance at FAU Libraries and the KCO became its professional ensemble-in-residence.

11 Years

The music of “Beyond the Tribes” was selected from more than 200 tunes considered over 11 years. It was recorded in 52 hours of recording sessions with a hand-picked 22-member orchestra. The KCO will play ten of the 12 tunes of the album at the release party.

“I’ve spent two years researching and arranging the material, which I’ve collected over the past 11 years,” Kula explains. “A lot of time was spent on the floor with dusty old boxes filled with sheet music as old as 300 years. I am taking Klezmer music out of the museum. I have played this music since childhood as the son of a Cantor. This is the music of dance bands of the Bar Mitzvah circuit. We are taking it up to the next level.”

Kula notes that traditional Jewish Klezmer tunes have popped up in swing era big bands, jazz music and pop.

Klezmer is a musical tradition that parallels Hasidic and Ashkenazic Judaism. A tradition of secular (non-liturgical) Jewish music was developed by musicians – and has evolved to the point now where klezmer originally referred to musical instruments, later became the musicians themselves, and in the mid-to-late 20th Century was used to identify a musical genre.

However klezmer now “is simply a catch-all term; it no longer defines one genre,” says Kula. “We have tried to find the music commonality in European, Latin American, Arabic, African, Israeli, even Louisiana music. Each of the tunes has passages I borrowed from sheet music in our library. Even in the two tunes of my composition, I have borrowed a fragment and expanded on it. Borrowing has always gone on in music. Barber, Copland and Piazzolla all borrowed, but they found their own voice.”

National Voice

Kula wants no less than a distinctive new voice of Klezmer music to take on the road.

“We want FAU and the Library to get national recognition,” he declares. “We are raising the money to take the band on a national tour. Our library collection is second to none and we want to share it. Ultimately we want to play Carnegie Hall.”

The core of the Klezmer Company Orchestra is Kula’s nine-piece Klezmer band fronted by Kula on accordion.

“I’m the three-legged accordionist,” he jokes. “There is the core Klezmer group, then the jazz leg and the classical leg. We call the classical and jazz musicians the blue and the red teams. Every musician on the album is credited.

After the concert there will be a 15-minute question-and-answer session with Kula and the entire orchestra.

“We all want to preserve our work for posterity,” he muses. “This is my artistic soul on the line. It is the culmination of 48 years of my life. There are risks. The South Florida audience is very traditional. We want them to see and hear Klezmer music in a new way.”

Call (800) 564-9539 or visit www.fauevents.com or www.klezmercompany.com for ticket information and information on forthcoming concerts

Contact Skip Sheffield at ssheffield@bocanews.com, or at 561-549-0831.