Klezmer does the blues

Concert to celebrate music of two cultures

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For the first time in Miami, a gospel choir from a Fort Lauderdale church will perform in a synagogue, together with a cantor, and a group of musicians.

The 60-member First Baptist Church Piney Grove choir will perform at Bet Shira Congregation in Pinecrest at 4 p.m. on Sunday Jan. 23rd. The choir will join Bet Shira cantor Mark Kula and the Klezmer Co. The synagogue’s youth choir will also appear.

“The name of my synagogue, Bet Shira, means ‘house of song,’ ” Kula said. “We do creative musical programming and this is the 14th annual concert for Tu B’Shevat, Jewish Earth Day. There are also several links and bridges taking place. This time of year is called Jewish Music Season, because Shabbat Shira is on Jan. 22. It also happens to be Black History Month. We saw a confluence of all possibilities when we envisioned this concert. Music innately has a spiritual power to comfort, to inspire....”

“And to celebrate,” added the cantor’s brother, Aaron Kula. He is the director of the Klezmer Co. and a creator of the concert. He is also a resident scholar in music at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. “My concept is to blend the music of these two cultures,” he said. “I was just trying to focus on the simple concept of connection – for example, the song ‘Let My People Go.’”

Donald Chisolm, director of the First Baptist Church Piney Grove Choir, said, “The song ‘Let My People Go’ is part of both traditions. You really cannot say whether it was a spiritual in the black community first or a song in the Jewish tradition. We know it’s within both faiths.”

The church was founded 100 years ago, and this is possibly the first time its choir has sung in a synagogue. The choir has performed with the Klezmer Co. twice, at...