Jewish concert will become a festival

Five-day celebration of culture set to start Wednesday at FAU

By Scott Travis
STAFF WRITER

A popular Klezmer concert at Florida Atlantic University is morphing this year into a five-day celebration of Jewish music, books, dance, art and film.

Kultur Festival 2009, which organizers said is the first of its kind in South Florida, is scheduled to start at 7 p.m. Wednesday with a multimedia performance of the children’s book Mendel’s Accordion.

The festival will wrap up with a 3 p.m. Sunday concert — “Tantz, Samba and Soul” — by the Klezmer Company Orchestra. The celebration will incorporate music from the Special Collections & Archives Department of FAU’s S.E. Wimberly Library.

The concert will be the crown jewel of the festival, said Aaron Kula, director of music collections and performances at FAU Libraries and conductor and composer for the orchestra.

He said audiences shouldn’t expect a regular Klezmer band like they would find at a party. The orchestra infuses Klezmer music with Latin, jazz, gospel and other genres. The concert will include a performance by the gospel group Ebony Chorale of the Palm Beaches.

Some traditionalists don’t like the music, he said. But he thinks it’s essential to find new ways to perform classics, including favorites by George Gershwin and Jacques Offenbach.

“Everyone fears letting go of tradition,” Kula said. “But without making progress and creating transformational art, the culture will die.”

There will be several other musical performances during the celebration. At 11 a.m. Thursday, New York Cantor Jacob Mendelson will lead six South Florida cantors in a presentation on improvisation.

“Many people have the wrong idea about cantorial improvisation,” Mendelson said. “They think the great cantors of the golden age sang whatever came off the top of their heads. The truth is one doesn’t improvise in a vacuum. It’s based on something learned.”

At 7:30 p.m., the festival will feature a screening of A Cantor’s Tale, a documentary about liturgical music focusing on Mendelson. He will be on hand for questions afterward.

Other events will include lectures about Bernstein and Marc Blitzstein, a display of artistic Hebrew books, Latin and Jewish dancing instruction and a screening of the film Where Neon Goes to Die.

Scott Travis can be reached at stravis@Sun-Sentinel.com or 561-243-6637.

If you go

What: Kultur Festival 2009: A Celebration of Jewish Music & Arts

When: Wednesday through Sunday

Where: FAU, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton

Admission: Passes ($85) will include entrance to all events and a copy of the Klezmer Company Orchestra’s Beyond the Tribes CD

Information: Call 800-564-9539 or see www.fauevents.com.