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A klezmer infusion

Composer mixes
the old with the new.

BY MARY DAMIANO
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

For Aaron Kula, preserving old music is good, but finding ways to bring that music to new audiences is better.

Kula, director of music collections at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, is a composer who incorporates secular Jewish music, or klezmer, into new compositions. One might describe what Kula does as another form of sampling, the process of incorporating a line of music from one song into another, but Kula expands on the concept. Kula takes a line of music from an old klezmer composition and uses it to create a new piece, incorporating folk music from the country related to the original melody.

"I make the material go from preservation to dancing in the aisles," Kula says.

The goal is to keep the music evolving in ways that can be enjoyed by today's listeners. Kula is showcasing the concept in "Beyond the Tribes," a benefit concert for the FAU libraries' music collections, premiering Sunday at the Carole and Barry Kaye Performing Arts Auditorium at FAU. "Beyond the Tribes" includes 25 new compositions incorporating the musical traditions of 14 countries. Titles like *Yiddische Polonaise*, *Jew Orleans March* and *Venezuelan Calypso* tell listeners the piece's flavor before the music begins. The result is a new kind of fusion that crosses centuries and musical boundaries.

"I'm blending three musical genres — classical orchestra, jazz musicians



MUSIC EVOLUTION: Aaron Kula is music director and conductor of the Klezmer Company Orchestra. FAU photo

and folk music — taking those three pieces of the puzzle and continuing to evolve what their role is within the context of klezmer music," Kula says.

Loosely translated, klezmer means instrumental music, and is a secular genre that falls outside the Jewish cantorial music found in synagogues. Kula describes it as party music; klezmer musicians in Europe during the 19th and 20th century were popular at weddings and other Jewish celebrations.

When Kula came to FAU 10 years ago, he found hundreds of boxes of klezmer sheet music being preserved

by the library. He also found it odd that a university located in an area with a large Jewish population did not have a Jewish music community. He founded the Klezmer Company Orchestra, which is now the ensemble in residence at FAU.

William Miller, director of FAU Libraries, says Kula is breaking ground with the Klezmer Company Orchestra and the libraries' collections.

"Aaron Kula is doing things with this music that no one else in the country has even thought of doing," Miller says.

"Beyond the Tribes" will feature 40

IF YOU GO

The Klezmer Company Orchestra performs "Beyond the Tribes" at 3 p.m. Sunday at the Carole and Barry Kaye Performing Arts Auditorium at Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton. Tickets are \$25-\$60. Call 800-564-9539 or visit fauevents.com. For information on the ensemble, visit klezmercompany.com.

performers, including the Klezmer Company Orchestra's nine core soloists, a classical string section made up of musicians from regional orchestras, the 20-member Judaica Choral Society, and New York-based vocalist Shira Lissek, who will sing selections in English, Hebrew, Latin and Yiddish.

The most unusual composition in "Beyond the Tribes" is *Voices for Soprano and Rabbi*, on which Kula collaborated with his brother, Rabbi Irwin Kula. For *Voices for Soprano and Rabbi*, Kula composed music incorporating biblical melodies from the Book of Lamentations describing the destruction of the ancient temple in Jerusalem. As part of the piece, Rabbi Kula and Lissek will chant the text of selected cell phone calls from 9-11 victims, linking the historic tragedies of ancient and modern destruction.

"It's the first time in my career that I'm on a klezmer concert and I'm presenting a piece that is so emotionally charged, yet it follows my mission of connecting old with new," says Kula.

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