Brothers join together for New Year concerts

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Two brothers, one a popular, local composer and conductor, the other a rabbi, contemporary author and frequent media commentator, will join their creative passions in two unusual Jewish New Year concerts.

"An American Jewish New Year: Jazz, Wisdom, Spirit" will bring together Aaron Kula, founder and conductor of the Klezmer Company Orchestra, and Irwin Kula, president of Cai — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership in New York City and a founder of the Adz Hayim Center for Jewish Living in Chicago for two unique concerts of High Holy Day music and the lessons of the holidays.

"It's the first jazz concert based on High Holy Day melodies," Aaron Kula said. "No one has done it." Irwin Kula added. "We're trying to create a new tradition" and "a different model for communicating wisdom, music and religious practice."

He said they want to make the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur scenes and wisdom more accessible to the many American Jews who are disconnected from the synagogue and Judaism.

"There are a lot of people that find the High Holidays unaccessible and mysterious," Aaron Kula said. "What we are trying to do is make it accessible and understandable."

The brothers talked over several years about doing a concert that combines progressive music with Jewish wisdom and spirituality. Recently, they decided to put their own money for the 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sept. 25 concerts at the Count de Hoernle Theatre in Boca Raton. South Florida's four Jewish Federations agreed to be co-sponsors and publicize the events.

Irwin Kula said the concert is not meant to compete with synagogues for High Holy Day worshipers. "We're about building connections," he said. "We're not about tearing things apart."

He thinks the concert will have three audiences: existing worshipers, people who never go to synagogue and people who are not Jewish but may be "tasting Jewish religion and practice" through intermarriage or relationships within the family.

Aaron Kula said that performing the music is not sacrilegious. "We're not destroying anything and we're not showing anything disrespect," he said. "We're not singing the words to these melodies. We're not offering a religious service, and we're not doing it on Rosh Hashanah and we're not using God's name in vain."

The purpose of the concert is "to get people to feel and think," he said. "Hopefully, we get them to think and feel enough that when they go to synagogue later in the week, it has more meaning."

Tenor Daniel Cochran will perform with the eight-member Klezmer Company Orchestra ensemble. Singing in English and Hebrew, he will perform eight songs, including Hasidic melodies in a gospel-rock style and two Negro spirituals that relate to Hebrew texts.

Cochran will also sing Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's composition "Open the Gates of Righteousness" ("Pichu Li"). The concert will conclude with the 1979 Israeli song "Hallelujah."

The idea is for the audience to be entertained, feel and learn, Aaron Kula said. "That to me is the perfect formula for a concert."

Tickets for "An American Jewish New Year: Jazz, Wisdom, Spirit" at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Sept. 25 at the Count de Hoernle Theatre. 7901 N. Federal Hwy., Boca Raton are $36 and $26. Call 561-241-7432, 877-245-7432 or visit http://www.caldwelltheatre.com.