From Shelf to Stage

How one FAU employee turns old into new

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Most students enrolled at FAU have entered the library, but few have ventured to the Department of Special Collections and Archives. That’s where Aaron Kula works, going through old music scores and other rare music.

“What makes me different is that my work crosses over various disciplines within the field of music, including classical, jazz, ethnomusicology, teaching, composing, conducting, and performing as an accordionist,” says Kula, the library’s director of music collections and performance. “I am a multifaceted musician who has classical training as a conductor and composer.”

Kula helps put life back into these songs that have been long forgotten by restoring them and bringing them into the 21st century.

Q. What exactly do you do with these old music scores?
A. I review and process music that is donated to the library to determine its historical value and if it should be part of the special collections or circulation. I also work with the library archivist to determine how best to preserve the material to avoid further deterioration. Finally, I also select specific music to be used in concerts as a way of promoting the use of the stored material.

Q. Who are your inspirations?
A. Well, I’ve been doing this music since second grade and it’s inspired by my father, who’s a cantor, so that’s my first source. My professor at University of Minnesota, who opened my ears, and the great musicians I worked with in Boston and the New England Conservatory of Music are some others.

Q. When did you first get the idea for Klezmer Company Orchestra (KCO)?
A. Every since I was in high school, that group existed as part of my life in some variations. It might have had a different name or different people, but the concept of this kind of fusion of a band and orchestra mixed with elements of classical cymbal and jazz was always part of my life.

Q. So, when was the first time you realized, “Wow, I’m really doing all of this?”
A. I think you work for the sake of creating something exceptional. Rarely does a composer or artist work for just the game. When it happens, you feel like it’s part of the natural purpose of evolution.

Q. Where do you see your music career in five years?
A. Well, what I’d like to see in conjunction with my work at the FAU library is the discovery of more music in the archives, and along with the KCO, a national tour.

Q. Where does all the music you work with come from?
A. Pretty much, we have music from all over the world, but it is primarily donated – or inherited and then donated by the families.

Q. How long did it take you to complete your newest album?
A. The album was a result of about 10 years of my work here at the library. What I did was select 12 of my favorite compositions and record them. It took 52 studio hours with 20 musicians. Our first run printed 5,000 units (CDs).

Q. Where can someone get the music?
A. Well, we have CDs for sale or the tracks available on iTunes. People are into it. The KCO is also on over 32 Web sites.

Q. Are you the only FAU employee in the KCO?
A. I’m the only full-time employee of FAU in the KCO. The others are freelance musicians who work for the orchestra that plays concerts for FAU. The membership of the orchestra comprises both classical and jazz musicians, which is what makes it so interesting.

Q. What can we expect to see next from you?
A. Every year we perform about a dozen concerts. The next project is revising an 1880’s opera. It’s a biblical love story about a woman named Shulamis.

Q. What’s the story behind the music?
A. We found the piano and vocal scores in our music archives. It had been published in 1912. Part of the responsibility for this library is to create new opportunities for the music to be performed.

Q. Why is it so important to perform the pieces?
A. We reform, reuse and put our scores into states where they can go from the shelf to the stage. That’s my job, because if we don’t get it performed, the music would disappear – and we don’t want the tradition to die.