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Your source for news and information on Jewish life, arts and culture in South Florida

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Jewish American Heritage Month spotlights musicians

By Marvin Glassman
Special Correspondent

The theme of this year's observance of Jewish American Heritage Month honors the contributions of Jews to American music.

"This year, Jewish American Heritage Month specifically recognizes Jewish contributions to American music. From symphony halls and Broadway theaters, to arenas filled with sounds ranging from rock n' roll to hip-hop, Jewish singers, songwriters, composers and musicians have given us all much to appreciate and celebrate," wrote U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Weston) in an official statement from her office.

Wasserman Schultz is credited as one of the advocates, along with the Jewish Museum of South Florida and South Florida Jewish community leaders for Jewish American Heritage Month.

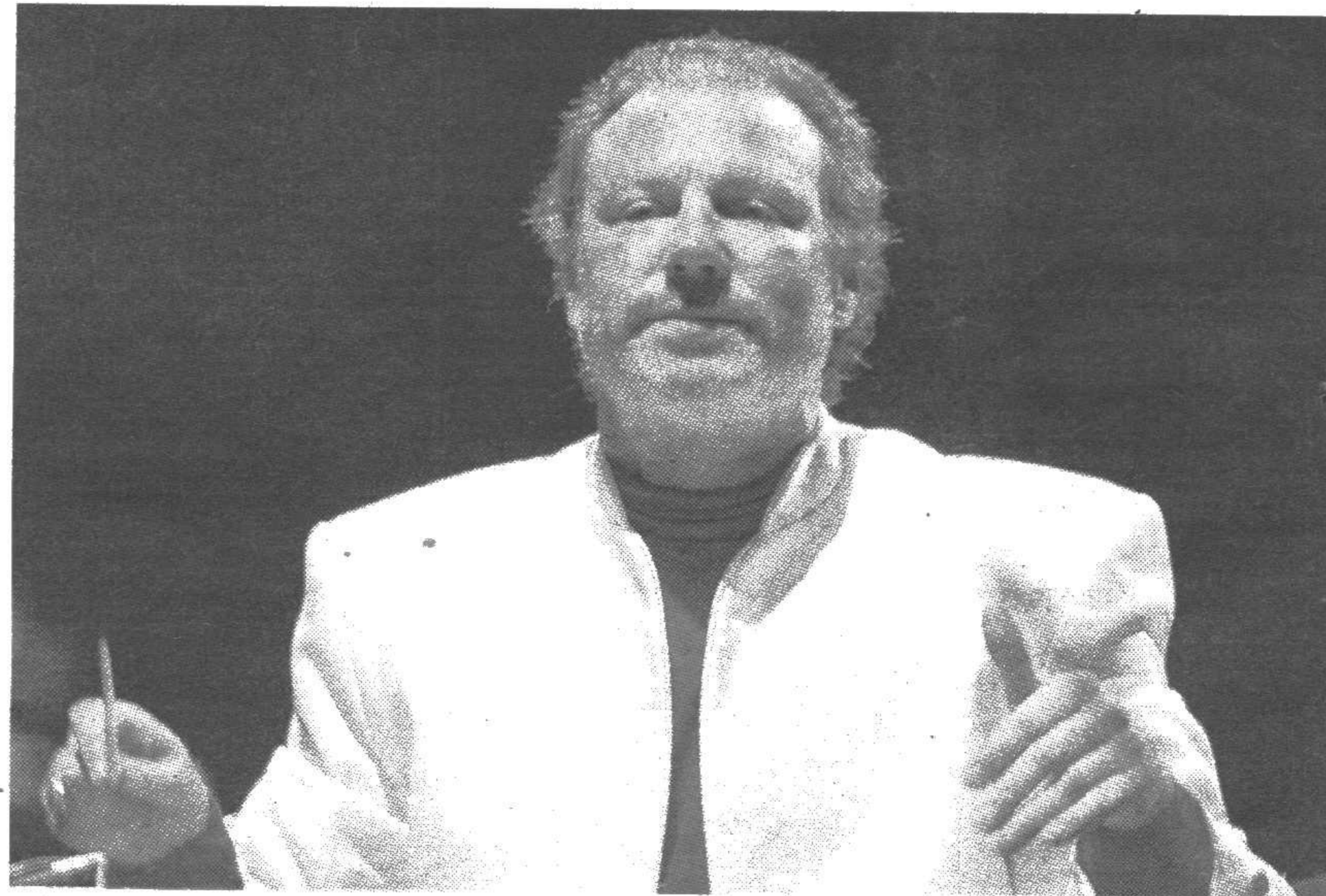
Many Jews in South Florida have contributed to American music through the composition of original songs and performances in concert.

Teen pianist/singer/songwriter Ethan Bortnick of Pembroke Pines, Music Director Aaron Kula of the Klezmer Company Orchestra in Boca Raton, singer David Presler of Boynton Beach and singer Debbie Taylor of Highland Lakes each achieved recognition for their contributions in American music.

Plans are being arranged for the four South Florida Jewish musicians to be honored with certificates of achievement and possibly a formal ceremony by the office of Wasserman Schultz.

At age 17, Bortnick has won acclaim for his popularity as a pianist, singer and composer. In 2010, Bortnick was listed in the "Guinness Book of World Records" for being the world's youngest solo musician to headline his own concert (at age nine).

Bortnick has been seen nationally on many Public Broadcasting System



COURTESY

Conductor Aaron Kula of the Klezmer Company Orchestra in Boca Raton is one of many South Florida Jewish musicians who have contributed to American music.

concerts, performing with Celine Dion, David Foster and other acclaimed musicians.

Bortnick is currently in Michigan on tour of his "A Celebration of America" concert series. He is proud of writing his own song "Reason to Believe" and for being honored during Jewish American Heritage Month.

"I truly am honored to be able to be part of Jewish American Heritage Month and sharing my music with the world," said Bortnick.

"One of the songs I wrote is called 'Reason to Believe' because, no matter what happens in life, there are a million reasons to believe in a bright future."

"My Jewish education teaches me many things, and one of those is that everyone should be doing a *mitzvah* and helping others. I truly hope, that through my music, I am doing just that," said Bortnick.

To learn more about Bortnick, go to

www.ethanbortnick.com.

Kula has achieved recognition in music as a composer, conductor and educator for more than 40 years. Kula's achievements include performing Klezmer music with his Klezmer Company Jazz Orchestra as well as memorable "Salute to America" summer concerts at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton over the past decade that included an innovative tribute concert to Leonard Bernstein performed in 2014.

"It is with great pride to be recognized for my work during Jewish American Heritage Month and to be included among the many outstanding South Florida musicians," said Kula.

Kula is currently in Israel for six weeks, being awarded a Fulbright grant by the U.S. government to conduct music as well as giving lectures to music students and faculty in Israel.

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