

Klezmer Company Orchestra's First International Tour Showcases World Music Created At FAU



Klezmer Company Orchestra, the professional ensemble-in-residence at Florida Atlantic University Libraries, is home from its first international tour, which took band members to Canada for performances at Toronto's Ashkenaz Festival, Montreal's Jewish Music Festival and the Blacksheep Inn, an award-winning juke-joint cabaret near Ottawa.

"It was the first time FAU Libraries' name was brought to an international music festival," said Aaron Kula, KCO's founder and director of music performance and education at the libraries. "This was a great opportunity to interact with world-class musicians from around the globe and to expand our community outreach."

Kula, an accordionist, conductor and composer, began fusing world music genres with centuries-old Klezmer music in FAU Libraries' print music collection in 1996. To showcase the music, or to move it from the shelves to the stage, Kula founded KCO, the only professional ensemble-in-residence at an academic institution in the U.S.

At both Jewish music festivals in Canada, KCO energized patrons with music from "Beyond the Tribes," its first award-winning independently produced CD in 2007 and "KlezmerOlogy," the group's second CD, which was released in 2012. Kula and Chaim Rubinov, KCO's trumpeter, composed more than a dozen new arrangements for the tour.

Eric Stein, artistic director for the Ashkenaz Festival, the largest festival of Jewish music and culture, said KCO was one of the most talked about bands at the festival, which drew 60,000 attendees and 200 musicians from 12 countries.

"In such a dense field it is a supreme accomplishment for any participating artist to stand out above the field, but Aaron and KCO achieved that with their performances at the festival," said Stein. "They had packed audiences for their shows and feedback was universally positive."

While in Toronto, Kula also presented "Black Sabbath: Blues and Jews," a lecture that explores the musical relationship between blacks and Jews, and KCO presented Klez4Kidz, a dramatic reading of the award-winning children's book "Mendel's Accordion."

The goal of the Montreal Jewish Music Festival, which featured acts from 15 countries, was to recruit bands that would stretch people's imagination of what defines Jewish music. KCO's distinctive Latin-Klezmer sound stood out as danceable, brash and fun, said Jason Rosenblatt, the festival's artistic director.

"KCO's show is replete with lush horns, dexterous improvisations and a supremely gifted rhythm section that morphed seamlessly from mambos and tangos to bulgars and freylachs," said Rosenblatt. "Thanks Aaron Kula and the KCO for bringing Montrealers a sweet taste of south Florida."