

KCO ensemble takes first international tour



Klezmer Company Orchestra — the professional ensemble-in-residence at FAU Libraries — at the recent Ashkenaz Festival in Toronto. (Submitted photo)

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SHARELINES

FAU's klezmer orchestra returns from tour

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Klezmer Company Orchestra (KCO), the professional ensemble-in-residence at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Libraries in **Boca Raton**, 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 international venues," 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 — 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 a U.S. academic institution.

At both Jewish music festivals in Canada, KCO energized patrons with music from "Beyond the Tribes," its first CD in 2007 and "KlezmerOlogy," the group's second CD from 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, one of North America's largest festivals of Jewish music and culture, said KCO was one of the most talked about bands at the festival, which drew 60,000 attendees.

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

The goal of the Montreal Jewish Music Festival 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.