

Festival

A good kind of weird

Fourth annual Kultur Festival starts Saturday at FAU

By James D. Davis, Staff writer

1:37 p.m. EST, March 1, 2012

Hasidic **jazz**. Kabbalistic quilting. Love songs from **the Holocaust**. Bossa nova blended with Russian klezmer music.

When you put Aaron Kula in charge, don't expect the usual Jewish-themed program.

"It's weird, in a good way," acknowledges Kula, artistic director of the eight-day program known as Kultur Festival, which will begin Saturday at Florida Atlantic University. "This is not just a museum festival. The best festivals center around music, theater, film, dance — the fine arts and performing arts."

The fourth annual festival will showcase the many types of films, music, books and plays in the Wimberly Library at the **Boca Raton** university. Kula draws from the collection to "perpetuate Jewish culture and heritage for the next generation. I want to go beyond preservation. I want to promote both tradition and innovation."



The first event is already sold out: "Making Trouble," a film about three generations of female Jewish comedians, including Molly Picon, **Fanny Brice**, **Sophie Tucker**, **Joan Rivers**, **Gilda Radner** and Wendy Wasserstein. The film comes from the National Jewish Film Institute, based at Brandeis University.

Also sold out is a program on Jewish storytelling, planned for Wednesday. The program will present FAU artist-in-residence Caren Neile offering improvisational interpretations of stories from the Bible, Jewish folklore and Yiddish literature.

But there's still plenty left. Kula's ensemble, the Klezmer Company Orchestra, will present the concert "Roots, Rhythm and Soul" 3 p.m. Sunday. The "supercharged" concert, as Kula calls it, will feature 22 songs, each written for a 25-piece orchestra.

The dizzying list of genres will include Latino cumbia, Hungarian czardas, 1940s swing and a Cajun-Jewish piece that Kula calls "Zydeco Zayde." The concert will also mark the release of KCO's new CD, "Klezmerology."

"I took the songs from the [library] collection, but I've fused them with unrelated musical genres," says Kula, who serves as director of music performance and education at the Wimberly Library. "It took me close to a year to put them together. They exist only here."

The following day at 7 p.m., FAU will host the Florida premiere of "The Gospel According to Jerry," a comedic play about Jewish and black American relationships. The play was written by Richard Krevolin and Irwin Kula, Aaron's brother. They'll hold a Q&A session afterward.

At 2 p.m. Tuesday, "Songs of Love From the Holocaust" will be presented by cantors Elliott Dicker and Bill Lieberman. The idea came from Kula's father, Cantor Morton Kula, who died in September.

"He said there are a lot of songs written during the Holocaust that are not about the horrors," Kula says. "They're beautiful songs about love for tradition, mother, child, spouse, country, a bird in the winter cold."

Jazz and chamber music will merge 7 p.m. Thursday with the Chassidic Jazz Project, featuring drummer Reuben Hoch. At 2 p.m. Friday, artist Louise Silk will explore the concept of Kabbalah through quilting. Silk will also help others learn "spiritual quilting" at a workshop the next day, starting at 10 a.m.

The Kultur Festival will close 2 p.m. March 11 with Ladino maven Flory Jagoda, who will offer Sephardic songs up to five centuries old. She'll bring three other women with her to sing pieces from several cultures: Spain, Greece, Turkey, Bosnia. The performance is being co-sponsored by the American Sephardi Federation of **Palm Beach County**.

Kultur Festival may sound like a mass of clashing styles, but Kula knows what he wants people to take away from the event.

"One, I'd like them to say, 'I loved the program,' " he says. "Two, an 'aha' moment. I want to give them not only entertainment but education. Three, I want them to say, 'I can't wait to come back to the library.' "

If you go

Kultur Festival

Where: Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road, **Boca Raton**

When: Saturday through March 11

Cost: \$10-\$95, depending on event

Contact: 800-564-9539 or Fauevents.com;