

# 'They ain't making Jews like Kinky Friedman'

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## ***Irreverent country singer returns to JAAMM Fest***

By Peter Jones

Never accuse the Mizel Arts and Culture Center at the Denver Jewish Community Center of being a slave to orthodoxy.

During the upcoming JAAMM Fest—otherwise known as a celebration of Jewish Authors, Artists, Music and Musicians—Mizel will welcome the likes of *New York Times* bestselling author and architect Charles Belfoure, as well as discussions on the European Jewish Renaissance and a world-premiere documentary about arts and society icon Peggy Guggenheim.

But stuck somewhere in the middle of Holocaust discussions and studies of Jewish genealogy will be a play called *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding* and a concert from iconoclastic Jewish country singer, mystery author and sometime Texas politician Kinky Friedman.

Talk about reformed Judaism.

"There's irony in my entire career," Friedman said of the full circle that has garnered invitations to perform at such Jewish celebrations, even after years of irreverence in songs like "They Ain't Making Jews Like Jesus Anymore."

Richard Friedman, 70, whose nickname was derived from his unruly hair, will perform Saturday, Oct. 10, at the JCC at the intersection of Glendale and Cherry Creek. It will be the latest in a long line of unlikely performances for an artist as unlikely as Friedman himself.

"Jesus and Moses were both good Jewish boys who got in a little trouble with the government," he said, noting admiration for their hutzpah.



Singer-songwriter Kinky Friedman has made a career of musical irreverence, often about his Judaism. He will perform at the Denver Jewish Community Center Oct. 10.

Photo courtesy of Kinky Friedman

Friedman's welcoming into the Jewish fold has been as improbable as his persona as a Jewish country singer from Chicago. In the 1970s when the decidedly alt-country artist was somehow booked into the usually conservative Grand Ole Opry, he was welcomed as the first "full Jew" to play the storied venue.

"They liked the song 'Sold American' because they knew the music was really country and good, even though maybe they weren't listening to the lyrics," he said.

Ironically, when Friedman played his acerbic material for the more musically open *Austin City Limits* as a hometown boy, he wound up being the only artist in the show's history whose segment was entirely cut from broadcast.

"At the time, it seemed like a Lenny Bruce type of setback," he said.

Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys [a play on Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys] were never destined to make Nashville's hit charts, but Friedman would become a noted outlier on Austin's outlaw-country movement, more famous for the likes of better-known friends Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings.

On the strength of his participation in Bob Dylan's legendary 1975 Rolling Thunder Review concert tour, Friedman became known for a range of "politically incorrect" musical commentaries on everything from feminism to Texas mass murderer Charles Whitman.

From the songwriter's more solemn side came the strange "Ride 'em Jewboy," a Western-themed—but serious—homage to Holocaust victims.

In 1996, Friedman learned that the song had been a favorite of Nelson Mandela while serving time in a South African prison.

"It was kind of his signoff every night," Friedman said, clearly moved by the memory. "He was listening to these smuggled tape cassettes."

Friedman later turned to mystery books, a humor column for *Texas Monthly* and a half-serious political career as a 2006 independent candidate for governor, earning more than 12 percent of the vote.

The sometime politician, who bides most of his time on his Texas ranch without benefit of an Internet connection, does not think much of the nation's current crop of presidential candidates of either party.

"I can't think of one political leader that inspires me," he said. "My idea is still a good one, to limit all elected official to two terms—one in office and one in prison."

Friedman thinks even less of what he calls the vanishing art of country music.

"It's click tracks and everything is written by a committee of five," he said. "It really does sound like background music for a frat party."

His own new CD is titled *The Loneliest Man I Ever Met*. It is a romantic album, according to the singer-songwriter.

"True love always ends in a hostage situation," he said. "We used the Frank Sinatra method, which is you do one or two takes and if you don't get it, you tear the thing up and throw it on the fire and go on to the next thing."

Friedman looks forward to performing the old and new music at the JCC and meeting whatever fans are interested after the show.

“I’ll sign everything, but bad legislation,” he said.

**Kinky Friedman**

**Saturday, Oct. 10**

**Denver Jewish Community Center, 350 S. Dahlia St.**

**For more information, visit [www.maccjcc.org](http://www.maccjcc.org) or call 303-316-6323**

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