

# Fiddler 2009 - NODA Crit

Contributed by Barrie Theobald

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION

LONDON REGION

Society ; Henley Amateur Operatic & Dramatic Society

Production ; FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Date ; 24th April 2009

Venue ; The Kenton Theatre, Henley-on-Thames

Report by ; Barrie Theobald, Asst.

NODA Representative - Area 13

Fiddler on the Roof is a musical with music by Jerry Bock, Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick and book by Joseph Stein, set in Tsarist Russia in 1905....It is based on Tevya and his Daughters (or Tevya the Milkman) and other tales by Sholem Aleichem.

Thank you for inviting Henry and me to your production of this very well-known show. I always enjoy visiting 'The Kenton' and have many happy memories of appearing on stage there myself, so I am very mindful of the problems that face fitting large casts on the relatively small stage with its limited access stage left. These problems had obviously been taken into account by your production team and it was pleasing to not notice any lining up of cast waiting to exit either side.

RAYMOND BURTON (Tevya) Over the years Ray has almost made this part his own locally and I have watched him perform it on many occasions (and having also appeared in the show with him I know how he strives to bring as professional a performance as he can to the role). He started this performance with a distinct disadvantage when delivering the opening lines 'A fiddler on the roof - sounds crazy no!' when there was no fiddler on the roof for him to refer to! I understand the reason Elizabeth Easton, who played the violin beautifully, could not climb up to the roof, but felt that in the circumstances she could have played in the pit and an actor mime the part as is so often done. Ray was later also disadvantaged when telling us about his injured horse whilst pulling on a cart that had a single central handle instead of shafts and whilst talking to God there was a tendency for him to hold his hands across his face, masking his features. Stronger direction may have been the answer. His musical numbers were well delivered.

JULIE HUNTINGTON (Golde) Coped adequately with the role and the musical numbers. Whilst Tevye is seen as (and believes he is) the mainstay of the family, to my mind Golde 'is the power behind the throne' and I wasn't always convinced that this was so in your portrayal! Could this also be down to the way the Director saw the show developing?

The performance of the duet Do You Love Me between Tevye and Golde was well presented.

KATE MASSEY (Tzeitel) This was a delightful characterisation and your scenes with both Tevye and Motel were most enjoyable. Do be careful though, when carrying prop babies - once or twice that's just what it became!!

HELEN EASTWOOD (Hodel) This was another excellent characterisation, marred at times by the lack of adequate amplification. The 'sparky' rapport with Perchick as you grew closer to each other was well depicted. For me, the scene at the railway station lost some of its poignancy through playing it against a snowy backcloth that made mockery of the reference to Siberia and its frozen wasteland. We also heard the train approach and depart with you still seated there! On the night I came the tabs failed to close properly after this scene - full marks for remaining in view until the stagehand sorted out the problem.

CLAIRE WALLIS (Chava) The heartache experienced by having to choose between marrying within the Jewish faith or risking all by going through a Christian ceremony with Fyedka was well conveyed, both before your wedding and later when you came to say your goodbyes after the pogrom drove your family away.

I particularly enjoyed the performance of Matchmaker, involving all three of you - it was beautifully sung and choreographed.

The roles of Shprintze and Bielke were shared by ELEANOR ADAMS / JOCELYN DARUVALLA-DAVIES and FLORENCE WIGGINS / JORDANNA DARUVALIA-DAVIES. I could see nothing in the programme or the theatre to indicate which pair appeared in the performance I was reviewing.

HOWARD TIMBERLAKE (Motel) gave us a very good portrayal of the shy tailor with ambitions. The singing of your main solo number Wonder of Wonders was accompanied by some very good choreography. I believe we saw a treadle sewing machine in your shop but only a hand machine on your trolley when you were leaving Anatevka.

GARETH SAUNDERS (Perchik) presented us with an interesting characterisation. Your stage presence overcame the musical shortcomings in your delivery of Now I Have Everything (that dreadfully difficult number set for Perchik right at the beginning of Act2). At least once, I felt I saw you appear without your prayer shawl.

MARK BUNKALL (Fyedka) I thoroughly enjoyed this portrayal and the way it was developed (but hope the hat mentioned in the programme notes was a better fit than the costume hat worn on stage!!) Unless Fyedka sings the high tenor solo in the Inn scene, he does not get an opportunity to let the audience hear his singing voice. There was good rapport between this role and Chava.

WENDY HUNTLEY (Yente) for me, both her costume and make-up detracted from the characterisation Wendy was striving to achieve - One was too 'fussy' and the other too heavy. However, she clearly maintained her accent throughout the show.

TIM SLOANE (Lazer Wolf) there are relatively few opportunities to develop a character but Tim made the most of these (although musically Lochiam was far from accurate). However, the relationship between your character and Tevye showed sufficient contrast between the inn scene and the wedding scene clearly revealed the change that would have occurred.

MARTIN JARVIS (Rabbi)

PETER WOOLLCOT (Constable) I have linked these two roles because I felt they each suffered in their individual ways from demonstrating a lack of authority such persons would hold. Whilst that didn't necessarily detract from the story line, it would certainly have enhanced it. Possibly for practical reasons the Rabbi found himself on a side table at the Wedding when I felt he should have had a place on the top table. By making the Constable's earlier rapport with Tevye fairly lighthearted, it becomes harder to accept the character's change when organizing the pogrom.

CAROLINE TURRINI (Fruma-Sarah) your character only appears in the Dream Scene and you were often left in the dark towards the back of the stage. However, you certainly ensured your contribution to the scene was heard.

CHORUS There are two distinct 'Chorus' parts in this show - The villagers and the Russians. The villagers (both ladies and gentlemen) tended to be a little less precise in their movements than the Russians and on the night I came The Rumour became a little discordant (It is a very difficult piece, isn't it!) However, the staging of the Sabbath Prayer on the dark stage was excellent. The young male Russian dancers excelled in the Inn scene and (with a change of costume) in the Bottle Dance. No bottles were dropped - congratulations.

PRODUCTION With a cast of over 40, the stage was frequently very full and all credit to both Director and Choreographer for managing to avoid bunching too often on exits. I have already mentioned one or two items that made mockery of the dialogue/lyrics - eg the placing of the Fiddler, the station backcloth and the head coverage. Before Perchik broke the local law on dancing with women, we had actually seen men and women doing so earlier in the wedding scene. Stage Manager CLIFF COLBORNE and his team worked very hard repositioning the basic house set which, I understand, was larger than envisaged when the set was ordered and, apart from the totally wrong milk cart to which reference has already been made, other props were appropriate. A variety of costumes were on display and most of them were smartly turned out - at times looking quite pristine for a small, Russian village. Some of the uniforms, however, could have benefitted from being ironed. Sound and lighting were mainly adequate, although I felt that Fruma-Sarah could have been more clearly lit in her scene. I was also a little unsure of the way Little Bird was staged - Tevye's 'thoughts' were rather vividly portrayed and I felt that either specialist lighting or, perhaps, the use of gauze cloth, would have better conveyed the sentiment behind the number. I guess some of the ladies insisted on applying their own make-up, though, as they appeared quite glamorous for Russian peasants!!! I found your programme very interesting and easy to read. Thank you for the reference to NODA - I hope it was submitted for the programme competition. Front of House staff were smartly turned out and competently welcomed their audience.

DAVID PARSONSON (Choreographer) Bearing in mind the limitations of the stage, all the choreography had been well thought-out, showing competence in this role. David was responsible, too, for recruiting the young male dancers whose contribution to the show was outstanding, especially in the Inn scene and at the wedding in the bottle dance.

MARK PIZER (Musical Director) occasionally allowed his orchestra to overpower the singing despite the radio mics. The Rumour number was a little ragged and uncertain in pitch but in the main the singing was competently delivered. Bearing in mind the relatively small number of gentlemen in the cast, To Life (which incidentally, did not get a mention in the list of musical items!!) this rousing number was enjoyably portrayed.

DIANE HAYLOR (Director) I have mentioned some of the points I felt were slightly inconsistent as well as those that could possibly have been considered from a different angle. However, this did not mean I did not enjoy your production, that resulted in an entertaining evening and introduced one or two different touches.

It was good to meet some of your Officers and Members before and after the show and we thank you for your generous entertainment during the interval. Our very best wishes with the challenges that 'Return to the Forbidden Planet' will present and which we look forward to with interest.

Barrie

Barrie Theobald

Asst. NODA Representative - Area 13.