



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : KATS
Production : Fiddler on the Roof
Date : 17/02/24
Venue : Kennet School, Thatcham
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to your production of Fiddler on The Roof one of the all-time greats, which sadly is no longer put on very frequently. Set in Anatevka a small Russian village in 1905 on the eve of the Russian Revolution, Fiddler on the Roof tells the story of Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman, the father of five daughters. He begins by explaining that by following religious and cultural tradition it is possible to remain balanced, otherwise one's position becomes as precarious as that of a fiddler on the roof. As the story unfolds, Tevye's beliefs are constantly challenged, and we are given a poignant reminder of what it is to be human in politically dark times.

Cast

David Richardson (Tevye) Tevye is a likeable, hard-working and pious man (somewhat of a dreamer) who tries always to see the positive side of life. David brought such a lightness of touch to this pivotal role and in his portrayal, you could see the joy and celebration in Tevye's heart being grateful for every mercy, love for his family, and pride in his community. As Tevye's devotion to tradition was challenged, David showed the conflicts in his mind between supporting his daughter's choices and loyalty to his and his tight-knit community's expectations. He delivered the dry humour and heartbreak of the role superbly. David sang well and gave a rousing rendition of 'Tradition' and 'If I Were a Rich Man' which contrasted well with the more poignant 'Do you Love me' his duet with Golde.

Siouxie Ashmore was a force to be reckoned with as Golde, Tevye's strong-willed wife who hopes for good matches for her five daughters. Siouxie was feisty and forceful portraying Golde as the strength behind Tevye keeping the household going. She provided the perfect foil to David making Golde a truly believable character with all her struggles bringing up her large family and also her devotion to

the traditions of the community and its identity. She had strong singing voice and sang with rich tone, clarity and tunefulness.

The Daughters

The three eldest daughters **Fiona Sinsbury** (Tzeitel), **Jenny Woolf** (Hodel) and **Ceri Lawrence** (Chava), each had their own individual journeys as they lost their hearts to very different men, from within their community and from outside. They were all strong in their characterisations as they all broke with “Tradition” which challenged their parents; Tevye and Golde and drove the story forward. Together, Fiona, Jenny and Ceri gave a light-hearted and entertaining performance of “Matchmaker” with their voices blending very well.

Madly in love with Motel the tailor, **Fiona** (Tzeitel) showed her struggles as she tried to stay loyal to her family whilst challenging the town’s traditions of a marrying a man chosen by the village matchmaker.

Jenny developed Hodel’s political beliefs in her characterisation and was strong in her defiance to her family and traditions by not asking permission to wed and then leaving to join Perchik in Siberia. She sang Hodel’s haunting solo ‘Far from the Home I Love’ beautifully as she said goodbye to her father at the train station, a very moving and emotional performance.

Ceri (Chava) was quietly scholarly and seemingly obedient until she fell in love with a Russian soldier and eloped with him. Ceri’s change in character as she made this huge break from tradition was well done and led to a tense moment when she broke her father’s heart and became ‘dead to him’.

Jess Lowe (Shprintze) and **Emma Johnson** (Bielke) the two younger daughters worked quietly in the house under their mother’s instruction and looked to be enjoying being released from their chores to take lessons at home from Perchik.

The Husbands

Billy Wild (Motel the Tailor and Russian Dancer) was initially meek and mild as the poor village tailor, but as he challenged the traditions of his parents in choosing his own wife, he came into his own and developed into a man worthy of marrying Tzeitel. Billy was an excellent dancer, leading the Russian Dancers in an impressive and very energetic Cossack dance and with the men of the village in the bottle dance.

Joe Rollinson was likeable and charming as Perchik the free-thinking outsider who fell in love with Hodel. He stood by his radical views holding his own against Tevye as he clashed with him idealistically. Joe spoke with clarity but was a little less assured in his singing.

Andrew Smith with his excellent guttural Russian accent gave a strong performance as Fyedka the young Russian soldier who saw past his military obligations when he fell in love with Chava. He showed emotion and regret as they were forced to elope when Tevye could not accept a total break in Jewish tradition.

Nick Saunders (Lazer Wolf) was in great form as the butcher who fell for the idea of marrying Tzeitel. His comic timing ensured that Lazar was not a cliché and the misunderstanding scene with Tevye as to whether it was Tevye daughter or his milk cow that he wanted was very well done. When he lost Tzeitel to Motel, he perfectly changed his character from affable to resentful chastising Tevye for breaking a promise. Nick had a rich singing voice and gave a good performance in 'To Life' with Tevye and the male ensemble.

Kayleigh Dibble (Yente the matchmaker) was suitably irritating and talkative as Yente. She clearly saw her purpose being undermined in the modern world with the daughters being allowed to make their own matches and certainly made her feelings felt.

Russell Barrett (Rabbi) was grave and serious in character demanding respect and clearly revered as the village's spiritual leader **Luke Johnson** (Mendel the Rabbi's son) was wary of Perchik's presence in

the village. He contrasted Mendel's intellectual nature with a more light-hearted side when drinking in the bar with his friends.

Dave Marsh (Constable) had an excellent Russian accent which he maintained throughout. He developed his character very well, initially seeming to like and support the Tevye and the Jewish villagers before turning against them as he carried out orders for a pogrom in which all Jewish citizens were forced to leave Anatevka. Dave spoke with authority and with good diction and had excellent stage presence.

Emma Low gave a fine performance as Grandma Tzeitel, Golde's deceased grandmother appearing as a ghost in the Dream Sequence to endorse the marriage of her granddaughter Tzeitel to Motel. Emma had a lovely voice with good tuning and tone and sang "A Blessing on this House" superbly.

Pam Hicks playing Fruma-Sarah, Lazar Wolfe's dead wife also appeared as a ghost in the dream sequence. She was suitably deranged as she warned of the dire consequences that would befall the family if Tevye and Golde allowed Tzeitel to marry her husband. She sang and moved with powerful physicality.

Ensemble

Nick Prince (Avram, the bookseller), **Janet Kilgallon-Brook** (Seraphina), **Isaac Dibble** (Ezekial), **Seb Waddington** (Mordcha, the inkeeper), **Eileen Paula** (Ruth), **Sawyer Yarnold** (Berl), **Emma Low** (Rifka) **Mandy Cole** (Shaindel), **Pam Hicks** (Ester), **Alison Brownfield** (Yussel), **Serrin Roberts** (Zelda), **Harriet Miller** (Eliana), **Chrissie Watson-Taylor** (Devorah), **Lily Tanner** (Nechama), **Sarah Clifton** (Miriam), **Kevin Miller** (Sasha and Nachum), **Gemma Cole** (The Fiddler) **Andy Low and Andy Taylor** (Russian Enforcers)

The ensemble portrayed Jewish villagers from Anatevka, and were split into Mamas, Papas, Sons and Daughters in the opening number 'Tradition'. They also doubled as well as Russians, and dancers. Many had smaller key roles with some step forward solo singing lines. Together they gave good support to the principals in their characterisations and adding some lovely harmonies to the group

songs. They were always in character and contributed to the general atmosphere in the village as it changed and they were driven out.

Russian Dancers Billy Wild, Kayleigh Dibble, Lily Tanner, Mandy Cole and Janet Kilgallon-Brook

Together this group performed an energetic Cossack dance which required strength and co-ordination musicality and timing in equal measure.

Creatives

Mike Cole (Director) assisted by **Jenny Woolf** (Producer) and **Karen Richardson** (Production Team Assistant)

The Director, Mike, had clearly encouraged the cast to develop their characters and every single person whether a principal or ensemble member showed that they had a part to play. There was definitely a feeling of camaraderie within the cast and the feelings of despair at the loss of traditions and then their homes were palpable. At times it is hard not to compare the story with much of what's going on in the world today, especially as a whole village sets off to seek refuge in new towns and cities far from the homes they are forced to leave, and this makes it all the more poignant today. I was impressed with how the actors playing Russians had developed their accents which added to their characterisation but did wonder why the Jewish villagers were speaking with English accents rather than with a Yiddish inflection which would have increased their authenticity. That said, this was a good performance of a classic musical and the directing team and cast got all the pathos and humour out of the script.

Siouxie Ashmore (Musical Director)

After slight hesitation at the beginning of the opening song 'Tradition', the cast were all in great voice and the diction in every classic solo and chorus number always shone through. Fiddler on the Roof is full of complex melodies and harmonies and Siouxie had worked with the cast to give good singing performances. Singing with tracks is a skill and she and the cast had obviously worked hard to master the entrances, and they sang with good volume and confidence. The group numbers were brilliantly done with the powerful 'Tradition' and 'Anatevka' contrasting perfectly with the more stylised songs

'To Life' and 'The Dream'. The soloists sang with character and emotion, and it was easy to sense the pressures and dilemmas their characters faced.

Gemma Cole (Choreographer)

From the opening number 'Tradition' with a full cast of over thirty people, to the party atmosphere of 'To Life', to a hilarious and stylised dream sequence in 'Tevye's Dream', the choreography was well designed. I believe that as part of the licence, the iconic moves from original choreographer Jerome Robbins are incorporated, but I am sure that Gemma also made her mark both in devising dance routines and teaching the set ones.

Dave Helyer (Stage Manager) assisted by **Andy Low, Andy Taylor and Dave Marsh** (Stage Crew)

The stage was efficiently managed with the large number of set pieces and items of furniture being moved on and off the stage smoothly. The scene changes were very well planned and executed, with little pause on the action. The stage manager also ensured that the large cast were able to make their many entrances and exits without obstruction.

Proscenium Theatrical Scenery and Properties Hire (Set and Properties)

The set hired from Proscenium worked very well and looked the part. Tevye's stone built house was very authentic complete with a tiled roof on which the fiddler could sit to play in the opening number. The house opened up to give the authentic interior complete with stove and a door leading to the rest of the house. To the side of the stage was Motel's tailor's shop complete with material and part sewn clothes. The properties had been very well selected with a very impressive milk cart complete with milk churns for Tevye and a period sewing machine for Motel.

Carl Dibble (Lighting Design)

The lighting had been well designed with different washes for day and night and in the most part all areas of the stage were well lit. The lighting cues were well timed, and the effects in the dream sequence very effective.

John Hicks and Karen Richardson (Sound Design)

The soundtrack for the music was very well managed with all the songs and underscore accurately cued. The balance between the music and the singers was excellent.

Janet Kilgallon-Brook (Costumes)

The costumes were spot on and truly authentic and appropriate to the period and the seasons. They had been thoroughly researched and were respectful of Jewish history and religious traditions. The Russians had a good array of fur Cossack hats, breeches and boots. The Constable's military coat was very impressive. The bottle dance hats were cleverly designed with a space to set the bottles.

I have always enjoyed this musical and was delighted to see KATS production. It was lovely to see the whole cast working as a team and enjoying performing together. Well done to all the cast and production team. I look forward to joining you again for your next show.

Cate

NODA London District 13 Representative