

## Review: Timeless classic "Fiddler on the Roof" sings for sold-out crowd at the Phil

By CHRIS SILK

Tuesday, March 27, 2012

NAPLES — "Fiddler on the Roof" rolled into Naples for a sold-out one-night-only show Monday. At three hours, "Fiddler" might need tuning, but it serves up solid entertainment. John Preece plays his Teyve for every bit of humor and wry emotion in the role, while joyous dance scenes leap off the stage.

[Chaim Topol headlined a April 2009 Equity tour that played the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall in Fort Myers.](#) Monday's show had a non-Equity cast and a smaller ensemble and orchestra, but featured the same director and creative team behind the sets, costumes, lighting and choreography; in other words - the same tour, but cheaper.

"Fiddler on the Roof," set in Tsarist Russia around 1905, is based on short stories by Sholem Aleichem. The show tells about devoutly Jewish milkman Teyve and his attempts to marry off five daughters while fighting to maintain his beliefs as the outside world starts to intrude on the tiny village of Anatevka.

"Fiddler" is one of musical theatre's most popular and enduring shows. Joseph Stein wrote the show's book, with lyrics by Sheldon Harnick and music by Jerry Bock. [The Naples Players production of "Fiddler on the Roof" in March 2010 was completely sold out before the show ever opened.](#)

A group of patrons behind me Monday were talking before the show; their remarks were to the effect of "you can never see a classic like this too many times." True; the crowd loved it. "Fiddler," with its timeless message about love versus change, brilliant tunes and buoyant, effervescent choreography should always retain the power to sweep audiences off to a magical village where neighbors gossip and Yenta makes matches.

John Preece makes a marvelous Teyve. He's in his tenth national tour of "Fiddler" - and knows the role inside and out. The tiny pauses, sidelong glances and withering looks from his conversations with God are especially funny. He brings real emotional heart to scenes with Teyve's array of daughters.

Gerri Weagraff gives zip to her Golde; she plays the role with a scolding, snappish anger that lifts it from the put-upon wife that's often seen. Brooke Hills (Tzeitel), Sarah Sesler (Hodel) and Chelsey LeBel (Chava) bring spirited life to their daughters; the "Matchmaker, Matchmaker" number sings.

What this particular "Fiddler" can lack is a sense of urgency that drives the plot forward. The action unfolds at a languid pace that fits the setting and timeless aura of

the show - but can leave modern audiences chafing for just a little more speed when the first half stretches to 100 minutes.

It's not that the show disappoints - it just feels a tiny bit slow and unfocused. Outside the stirring dance scenes, the movement can feel mechanical, proceeding from house to tavern to yard by rote. Part of the problem may be that the production itself was designed for a smaller stage. A forest frame comes in about 12 feet on either side of the stage, visually squeezing the show.

"Fiddler" does sing during its joyful, exuberant dance numbers. Jerome Robbins' original choreography was recreated by director/choreographer Sammy Dallas Bayes. The show explodes with passion during scenes like the iconic "Tradition," "To Life" and the wedding dance.

*Did you see "Fiddler on the Roof?" What did you think? Email me, [csilk@naplesnews.com](mailto:csilk@naplesnews.com), find me on Twitter at [@napleschris](https://twitter.com/napleschris) or read my [Stage Door theater blog](#). You can also sign up to [receive the Stage Door blog via email](#).*



© 2012 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online