



BWW Reviews: FIDDLER Does Not Exactly Blow ROOF off The Bushnell

[Back to the Article](#)

by Jacques Lamarre



Fiddler on the Roof -

The National Tour

Book by [Joseph Stein](#)

Music by [Jerry Bock](#)

Lyrics by [Sheldon](#)

[Harnick](#)

Directed by [Sammy](#)

[Dallas Bayes](#)

Based on the original

choreography and

direction by [Jerome](#)

[Robbins](#)

at The Bushnell

Center for the

Performing Arts in

Hartford

www.bushnell.org

The national tour of Harnick and Bock's classic musical *Fiddler on the Roof* has arrived at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts through Sunday. While the show does not blow the gilded roof off the venue, it doesn't exactly come crashing down either. The production, headed by [John Preece](#) who has played the role of Tevye the better part of 2,000 times, is serviceable, enjoyable and largely unexceptional. It is what The Bushnell intended it to be: an inoffensive and inexpensive slot-filler in their subscription series.

The production is fairly bare-bones compared to recent Broadway at The Bushnell touring shows. The orchestra is more of a band with seven instrumentalists, leaving the powerful score feeling a little gaunt at times. The sets do Russian poverty proud and a series of telescoping drops constrict the venue's large playing space. Well, Anatevka is a poor shtetl, so I guess we shouldn't expect more.

The national tour does have quite a few things going for it. First and foremost, it has the glorious songs that have become standards: "Tradition," "Sunrise Sunset," "If I Were a Rich Man," "Matchmaker Matchmaker," and on and on. The large cast helps make up for the anemic orchestrations with strong voices and energy. Act 2 holds a surprise in the number "Now I Have Everything," a song that was not used in the popular film version. The remaining songs in Act 2 are all ballads performed at faster tempi than in the movie which, unfortunately, robs some of the emotion of the songs, particularly the moving "Chava Ballet" and "Far From the Home I Love."

The production also has an asset in [Jerome Robbins'](#) original choreography, particularly in the two big showpiece dance numbers, "L'Chaim" and "The Wedding," featuring the edge-of-your-seat bottle dance. The choreography in the Fruma-Sarah dream/nightmare sequence is amusing, but the number fails to produce the outrageously funny scares that it should inspire. The opening number "Tradition" felt a little lethargic, but the show picks up energy as it goes along and the two

hour-and-forty five minute runtime moves quickly.

As the ostensible star of the production, [John Preece](#) is a crowd pleaser, to be sure. He certainly looks and can sing the part with verve. Although Tevye's wife Golde strives to keep a kosher home, Preece serves up a sizable piece of ham with an inexhaustible (and exhausting) stream of comic bits. Tevye the milk man has a job (but a lame horse), a devoted wife (if nagging), and a roof over his head (complete with fiddler). Despite all this, he is caught in the crosshairs of a world changing at an uncomfortable pace. Preece is perhaps too comfortable in the role at this point. His jokey approach lands many laughs, but often at the expense of the very real drama inherent in a story of about aging, political revolution, poverty, mass exodus, and religious persecution.

The women in the cast are particularly strong with [Gerri Weagraff](#) as a tart, exasperated Golde and [Pamela D. Chabora](#) as a perfectly meddling Yente. Tevye's trouble-making trio of daughters, played by [Brooke Hills](#), [Sarah Sesler](#), and [Chelsey LeBel](#), are all delightful and earnest in their respective scenes. As the young maids' husbands, [Joshua Phan-Gruber](#) renders the finest performance as the student revolutionary Perchik. [Michael Shultz](#) makes the Russian soldier Fyedka a much stronger character than in the film. [Andrew Boza](#) has fun with his part as Motel the tailor, but is a bit unnatural in his performance.

So, in the end, is the production worth a visit to The Bushnell? As Tevye might say, "On the one hand, yes. On the other hand..."

Photo of Stephen [Charles Turner](#) and [John Preece](#) by [Carol Rosegg](#).