

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF | MARCH 7, 2012

'Fiddler on the Roof' passes the test of time



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"Fiddler on the Roof"

Credits: Carol Rosegg



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Slideshow: "Fiddler on the Roof"

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Rating for "Fiddler on the Roof":

At Tuesday's opening of *Fiddler on the Roof*

(<http://www.fiddlerontour.com/index.html>) at the Old National Centre in Indianapolis, this writer couldn't help but reflect on seeing the show the first time (also his very first professional musical) as an impressionable young theatre student, back in 1967 at Chicago's *McVickers Theater* (<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/1798>). The musical, which premiered on Broadway in 1964, was moving and meaningful then and remains just as much so today. It plays here until Sunday, March 11.

Produced by *Troika Entertainment* (<http://troika.com/>), this non-equity production is on a North American tour and is part of the *Broadway Across America Indianapolis* (<http://indianapolis.broadway.com/>) series.

With book by Joseph Stein, music by Jerry Bock and lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, *Fiddler on the Roof* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddler_on_the_Roof) is based on the stories of *Sholom Aleichem* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholem_Aleichem) and is set in 1905 Czarist Russia.

It is a bittersweet, yet hopeful, tale about Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman and his family who live in a village named Anatevka. In an effort to maintain cultural and religious traditions, strong believer Tevye struggles with his three daughters' choices for suitors and their determination to follow their hearts. Eventually though, his family finds reconciliation and is drawn even closer once religious persecution drives them and their fellow villagers from their homes.

Starring seasoned actors John Preece as Tevye and *Gerri Weagraff* (<http://www.examiner.com/performing-arts-in-indianapolis/gerri-weagraff-plays-tevye-s-other-half-fiddler>) as Golde, the production featured a strong cast of performers who did an outstanding job of

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capturing the closeness of both the family unit and the community that are the focus of the musical's inspirational story.

Preece's characterization of Tevye was most notable for the subtle and nuanced way he delivered comic dialogue, often spoken during frequent discussions with God regarding choices he had to make or circumstances he had to accept. Rather than playing for laughs with humor that was broad, Preece's brand of comedy was understated and therefore more effective.

Weagraff went far beyond playing Golde as a simple and one-dimensional stock Jewish mother. Though rigid, sharp-tongued, manipulative and impatient, she also effectively portrayed a strong and courageous mother who deeply loves her family and is willing to go to any length to protect them.

Preece and Weagraff, who were entirely believable as husband and wife, were charming during the song *Do You Love Me?*, in which they profess their devotion to one another.

Well-cast, appealing and uniformly talented were the actors playing Tevye's daughters and their respective suitors. They were Brooke Hills as Tzeitel with Andrew Boza as Motel, Sarah Sesler as Hodel with Joshua Phan-Gruber as Perchik and Chelsey LeBel as Chava with Michael Schultz as Fyedka.

Making this production of *Fiddler* especially unique is the fact that **Jerome Robbins** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome_Robbins), original choreography was reproduced by Sammy Dallas Bayes, the show's director. He was in the original production of *Fiddler* and also worked on the 1971 **film version** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddler_on_the_Roof_%28film%29).

Undeniably, the highlights of the show were the dance numbers which reflected Robbins' genius. Favorites included *To Life*, when both the Jewish and Russian men celebrate Tzeitel's engagement to Motel in the village inn, and *Wedding Celebration/The Bottle Dance*, which takes place during the couple's wedding celebration.

Tickets for *Fiddler on the Roof* are available at the Broadway Across America Box Office downtown at 342 Massachusetts Avenue, **Clowes Memorial Hall** (<http://www.cloweshall.org/>), Old National Centre Ticket Office, online at www.broadwayacrossamerica.com (<http://www.broadwayacrossamerica.com/>) or by phone at 1-800-982-2787.



By **Tom Alvarez**

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Tom Alvarez reports on arts and entertainment in Indianapolis. A longtime journalist, reviewer and Emmy-winning television and video producer...

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