

FIDDLER Turns 50: The "Tradition" Continues at Candlelight

Posted by **John Muller**

No matter what your theatrical experiences are it's likely you have encountered one of the most known shows to hit the boards, Joseph Stein's, Jerry Bock's and Sheldon Harnick's, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF. The audience at the Candlelight Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware is no exception. When House Manager, Jodi McLane, asked the near sold out crowd if there was anyone there that had never seen the show before, there were only a handful of hands. The rest of us applauded and welcomed the newcomers to, not only a long tradition of theatrical excellence in the form of a show that has been long lauded as one of the best of Broadway, but also a tradition of theatrical excellence from a theatre that knows the importance of work ethic, continually honing the talent, and welcoming new talent to add to its charge. The Candlelight Theatre is a place where magic happens, and this production of FIDDLER ON THE ROOF is no exception.

Yes, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF turns 50 this year, but it is still as fresh and vibrant and powerful thanks to a superb cast, technicians and production staff. The folks at the Candlelight Theatre definitely know how to put on a show, and it is clear right down to the most minute detail that their top priority is maintaining the integrity of the show.

For those that are not familiar with the story, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF is the story of a family living in Imperial Russia in the early 1900s. The story opens with Tevye, also referred to as Papa, telling of the importance of traditions. Shortly after we learn that marriages are arranged in this community (called shtetls) by a Matchmaker. Yente, the Matchmaker arranges the marriage of Tevye's oldest daughter, Tzeitel, to the butcher, Lazar Wolf, who is many, many years older than her. Of course, she is not happy about this and declares her love and desire to marry the Tailor, Motel, who shares in her affections. After some thought, in the form of a musical aside, Tevye breaks tradition and gives his permission for Tzeitel to marry Motel. This begins a snowball effect, resulting in his second oldest daughter, Hodel, asking for permission to marry, Perchik, a student hired by Tevye to teach his daughters and his third daughter informing, not asking Tevye, that she will be marrying Fyedka. Each time he gives in a little less until the final proposal where he puts his foot firmly on the ground, without much effect – they run off together anyway. Eventually, the entire family is run out of its community and home, as the Russian government closes down all the shtetls and forces all the Jews to leave Russia. Tevye and his family split up to different locations, hoping to one day be together again.

The role of Tevye is brilliantly played by David Wills. Wills' stage presence and charisma are endearing from the opening scene until the final bow. His use of facial expression, body language and personality connect him to the audience immediately, which is so necessary in a production where the main character must interact with the audience to tell the story throughout the entire show. Gerri Weagraff (Golde) is no stranger to the stage, or this role for that matter, and it clearly shows in her well honed characterization, even the way she walks drips of professionalism. Tori Healy (Tzeitel)



Gerri Weagraff (Golde), David Wills (Tevye) in a scene from

is another exceptionally strong part of this cast that is able to draw the audience into her plight of being promised to one man but loving another, making the audience want to stand and applaud when she stands up to her father for what she wants and professes her love of the poor Tailor, relinquishing the rich Butcher. Every single actor in this production is exceptional. I could go on and on gushing over this cast. They are all brilliant.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF.

In addition to the brilliant acting, there is brilliance behind the scenes as well. The choreography of Jody Anderson and Robert Miller is crisp, calculated and rehearsed to perfection. The bottle dance, no small task, is delivered with such precision the audience responded both vocally (with awe) and physically (with thunderous applause) as Bob Miller, Achilles Inverso, Ricky Rotandi, and Eldon Oswald made the dance look effortless and fun. Another real treat is the set design by Jeff Reim. The multifaceted use of the "house" to represent so many different locations is more than amazing. I actually forgot it was the same set piece used three different ways throughout the show. However, I must admit, my favorite part of the set design, a lighting effect by Mark Clapp, is something so small. In the distance, the other homes in Anatevka appear, with tiny little lights in their windows. Brilliant!

Because of its historical significance, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF stands the test of time. Almost every theatre group across the country puts this show on its stage at one point or another. It's a tradition. There is a tradition at the Candlelight Theatre, as well, excellence. Excellence in casting, excellence in direction, excellence in design, excellence in knowing what the audience wants and delivering it. Happy Anniversary FIDDLER ON THE ROOF and congratulations Candlelight for an outstanding performance. The Matchmaker got this one right...FIDDLER ON THE ROOF and the Candlelight Theatre are the perfect match!

The Candlelight Theatre's production of FIDDLER ON THE ROOF runs through November 2nd.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Musical by Joseph Stein, Jerry Bock, and Sheldon Harnick

Directed by Bob Kelly

September 12 – November 2, 2014

The Candlelight Theatre

2208 Millers Road

Wilmington, Delaware 19810

302-475-2313

<http://candlelighttheatredelaware.org>