

Fiddler on the Roof

YAOS Productions Thursday 19th March 2026 at Westlands Entertainment Venue

Introduction

I was very much looking forward to watching this, the third performance of six of the classic musical Fiddler on The Roof.

From the 'in-character' welcome to the theatre, this was a production in which there had clearly been close attention to fine detail. I very much enjoyed it and my observations, those of just one member of your Thursday evening audience, are also focussed on relatively minor details.

Direction and Choreography - Jeremy Tustin

I am aware that you have now worked with YAOS for some years as a professional Director/Choreographer and I have been fortunate to witness a number of the shows which have benefitted from your high performance standards.

Fiddler on the Roof has continued this upward trajectory. It was evident that the YAOS actors were not just putting on a show; that they had an understanding of the significance of the historic events portrayed, changes in Eastern Europe still within the folk memory of families in your audience. In complete contrast to most modern musical theatre shows, Fiddler on the Roof relies on the use of silence and reflection to tell what for many is a painful story and unusually both opens and closes with cast members in silence on stage.

Traditional acting methods were however also much in evidence. Key moments in the plot were emphasised by moments of tableau, most notably the final scene in which pauses in Tevye's journey emphasise the eventual geographical separation from his 3 elder daughters and their partners. There was gentle humour both in individual characterisation, notably Yente, and in interactions such as that between Tevye and Lazar Wolf on the subject of his potential marriage with Tzeitel. The Act 2 'Gossip' sequence spreading news of Perchik's arrest by 'Chinese whispers' was a clever choreography of sounds.

The message brought by Perchik from his student home in Kviv, of the eviction of Jews from their villages, is one which probably resonates with today's adult population more so than for the last half century as modern communication makes us more aware of world events. Many nowadays have connections with refugees or communities of exiles and I was impressed that your performers were able to convey not only the fear and distrust of those with some knowledge but also the attitude of others who wished to continue to live in ignorance of the potential problems to come.

Casting of principal characters was appropriate. Within the minor roles I did note a couple of 'surprise' elements.....an immaculate beggar with impeccable and highly educated diction and a rabbi who was, by turns, extremely frail and shaky or a stylish and fairly lively dancer!

Your programme acknowledges that the choreography for this production of Fiddler on the Roof is not original; at times it was certainly not simple either and there was undoubtedly a need for minor adjustments to 'fit' the venue. The stage area and surrounding floor space was used to the full with height variation

briefly provided using the roof of the freestanding scenery and on and under tabletops (notably in the 'nightmare' sequence).

Much of the Fiddler on the Roof choreography needs to be performed by actors of several generations and features traditional dance, such as Circle dance which has long been part of Eastern European Jewish tradition. An example of this is the Hora, wedding dance. The use of dance to emphasize the awkward relationship between those of Jewish and Russian descent was clear in the celebration of Lazar Wolf's engagement to Tzeitel.

YAOS's performance featured a large cast on a shallow, wide, stage and armography was used very effectively alongside sideways movement in limited space and with no collisions. I was particularly impressed by the interpretation of the 'bottle dance'.

For me the standout choreography section was the Dream sequence, such a contrast to the rest of the show featuring much more relaxed dance moves, great use of the stage furniture to add height and depth, superb lighting effects and clever use of white draped fabric for costuming.

Dance Captain, Chris Holman-Holmes is also to be commended for his role in helping your vision become reality with a keen attention to detail.

Musical Direction - Lucy Singleton

The score for Fiddler on the Roof has already passed the test of time. 'Tradition', 'Matchmaker', 'If I were a Rich Man' and 'Sunrise, Sunset' are familiar tunes to many who do not have any particular interest in Musical Theatre. Add in a very experienced band of musicians, accustomed to playing together for many years, a strong

cast of principals and an ensemble clearly enjoying what they are doing and there is everything to like about this show.

The songs set the scenes. 'Tradition' teaches the audience about the different roles of fathers, mothers, sons and daughters within the village community, 'Matchmaker' the traditional role of women who guard that important task. The former is solemn in delivery, the latter maybe seems a little lighthearted; when this musical first aired in 1964, some descendants of the Jewish communities affected considered the show superficial, but with contemporaneous shows including 'Hello Dolly', it was solemn by comparison and could perhaps have been better described as early-stage 'reality' theatre.

It is good to see YAOS welcoming a new Musical Director into the fold. Even with experienced performers, results don't come without hard work in rehearsal. From the beautiful atmospheric opening and finale employing the band's violinist, Christine Bull, to mirror the solo onstage fiddler, the music provided sympathetic support to all performers. In my view, the singing of both individuals and ensemble was of a near-professional standard with excellent diction and attention to the emotion of the pieces. Whilst 'Matchmaker', in my opinion, perhaps crossed the fine line between delivery by young women or by powerful, trained professional voices, the Sabbath Prayer, with solo work by Tevye and Golde was particularly atmospheric. You have done a great job. I hope you continue to work with the society which you followed as a youngster for many years to come.

(Incidentally it is not clear who was responsible for the selection of recorded klezmer music with which early arrivals were welcomed into the theatre auditorium and it may well not have been you, so this observation has not formed part of my assessment process.

Why the same or similar, an excellent choice, was not deployed as we departed is a mystery. 'Fiddler' closes on a reflective note and the jolly Irish fiddle music just seemed incongruous.)

Production

Set Design and Stage Management

Your two, plain, wood-faced, freestanding structures represented the simplicity and relative poverty of the village very well. One opened out to become the interior of the Tevye house, the other represented other buildings such as Motet's tailoring shop.

Broadening the performance space into the auditorium, by encasing the stage boundaries in a similar style, provided homes and working environments to the family groupings which the audience came to know, whilst also almost welcoming the occupants of the front rows into the village community. This was a clever idea which looked great from the back of the theatre. (Unfortunately the crumpled orange-cellophaned 'windows' reflected both stage and orchestra lighting; opaque plastic might have worked better.) Freestanding furniture was simple in style and rearranged by both cast members and crew quietly and efficiently, sometimes covered by action elsewhere, such as Tevye laboriously hauling his milk-cart up the ramp onto the stage. The 'station bench' presumably doubled as a bed; from my seat I could unfortunately see the striped bedlinen behind the backboard which did look a little odd.

Lighting

The professional lighting rig did everything one could want to enhance the appearance of a simple, single set on a big stage.

Lighting changes were smooth and discreet, never distracting from the plotline and always helpful to the audience in highlighting aspects of the action. I highlighted the lighting changes during 'If I were a Wealthy Man' which in no way distracted from the solo singer. Moments of action which were off the main stage were also well-lit, whether it be Tevye emerging from his farm shed and progressing laboriously up the ramp or the solemn singing of the candlelit Sabbath Prayer within the several Anatevka households. There was also a nod to early 20th century history in the use of red light for the first entry of the non-Jewish Russian ensemble

Sound

The professional sound system allowed the audience to hear both spoken words and sung lyrics clearly. The balance between members of both the ensemble and smaller groupings was generally good although at times I felt that the both Tzeitel and Hodel would have seemed more natural and more youthful with a little less vocal volume. At this performance there were a couple of unfortunate microphone glitches affecting more than one character.

Properties

Whilst properties were not numerous, they fitted the bill and, apart from the two 'wooden' buckets, looked of appropriate vintage. I noted the milk churns and ladle, the treadle sewing machine, the teapot and various drinking vessels and candlesticks plus gifts of bedding and the various suitcases carried by departing villagers. The bottles used for the men's wedding dance looked great...it was just a pity that those of us in the elevated seats could see exactly

how they could be quite firmly attached to hats adapted for the purpose!

When the 'destruction' of the village was signalled during the wedding party at the end of Act 1, there was just enough on stage to make it look a mess, but not enough to get in the way. A good balance.

Costume, Hair and Make-up

Costuming for this show, a mix of hired and the Society's own, not only gave the audience a sense of both location and period but also supported our awareness of the social divisions. The Jewish villagers and Rabbis with the prayer shawls and head coverings of their faith-based traditions, were clearly differentiated from the baggy trousered Russians, notably Fyedka and the Constable's men.

Footwear looked good, especially the range of little buttoned, boots worn by the ladies of the cast.

Hair, beards and makeup were simple and appropriate to the characters portrayed

My only observation is that for impoverished people, everyone looked impeccably smart, clean and not a bit faded...but then again, the villagers are proud people.

Observations on some individual and group performances

Luke Whitchurch as Tevye

As a poor but hard-working, small-scale farmer, barely making ends meet, in a world where a new sewing machine is mentioned in the same breath as a new grandchild, Tevye is nonetheless the

representative of what, within his tradition binds a family, and also a village, together. He follows the traditions of his forefathers without question, the giving of food for a blessing and the many rituals. Your first appearance onstage was in quiet and alone. In both this and several later sequences, you talk, as it appears, direct to the audience, but are actually consulting God, as you face some difficult decisions, including a sick horse and a broken sewing machine. Your character was believable from the outset as you drew the audience into Teyve's world. Classic songs including the solo, 'If I Were a Rich Man' were delivered in a suitably reflective manner. I admired your ability to maintain the gentle Eastern European accent even when singing...not easy.

With three daughters approaching marriageable age, you were first torn between marrying your eldest to a relatively wealthy widower, the butcher Lazar Wolf or to her childhood admirer, the tailor, Motel. As a man of simple logic you, do not even notice that, for a large part of your discussion with Lazar Wolf, you are talking at cross purposes, he about your daughter, you about the purchase of a cow. Initially favouring Wolf and celebrating in the song 'To Life', after much self-examination (Teyve's Monologue) and a nightmare featuring your deceased grandmother and Lazar's deceased first wife, you eventually bow to your daughter's wish to marry for love. Alone in facing the audience, you acknowledge in the song 'Sunrise , Sunset,' that it was the right decision. Your second daughter, Hodel, is clearly drawn to a more traditional match with the rabbi's son but to everyone's surprise he is looking to a modern world for his inspiration. Perchik teaches his bride-to-be to question what she is told and to dance freely in public. They demonstrate this skill together, crossing the traditional male/female barrier at Tzeitel's wedding, and encouraging others, including eventually Golde and

Tevye, to join in, later questioning his own relationship when he considers the decline in importance of the role of Matchmaker. When the time comes for the third daughter to make her choice, in this case a bookish non-Jew, the world is already much changed. She elopes and is married by a priest, leading Tevye into yet more self-examination 'can I deny everything I believe in?....on the other hand'. You undoubtedly had the audience's sympathy when two young boys were matched to your youngest daughters, before they were of an age to speak up for themselves!

Thank you for an excellent performance which is key to the success of the show.

Naomi Lawton as Golde

I liked your interpretation of the role of 'traditional wife'. Whether there is, or has ever been, romance within this arranged marriage of many years is left to question but there is undoubtedly respect and mutual support which only grows stronger in difficult circumstances. You are the proud mother and educator of your five daughters, teaching them, for example, the traditions of preparing the Shabbat table but seemingly more adaptable and accepting of the 'modern' changes in your world than your husband Tevye. I noted excellent singing both in duet and solo elements.

Amy McIntosh as Tzeitel

Raised as the eldest child within the 'tradition', Amy is the quietest and most accepting of the expectation that she will marry someone chosen by the matchmaker from within her community. However her eye has been caught by Motel and she fights to marry the man she

loves, in a small way challenging all that previous generations respect. I liked your interpretation of this role and your relationship with Motel was entirely believable. As a trained singer, you have a lovely voice which is both powerful and tuneful. Perhaps softening it a little for a character such as Tzeitel might have matched her personality a little more closely.

Rosie Horsey as Hodel

As second child, Hodel seemingly hides in her sister's shadow until her personality is drawn out by admirer Perchik. When he is arrested for revolutionary activities, her strength of character becomes clear as she commits to following him to exile in Siberia. You seemed to enjoy playing the role within the family sisterhood.

Amelie Rendell-Graham (aged 14) as Chava

The youngest and least malleable of the sisters, Chava is the one who is silently defiant. You want to read and learn about the world outside your community. This was a mature performance from a 14 year-old actor and a believable rapport with Fyedka. Well done

Charlie Wanklin as Yente

I very much liked your interpretation of the Matchmaker, an important role within the 'tradition' but challenged by the modern world. You are by turn highly respected and a figure of fun, almost ridicule, by the younger generation. The loud, larger than life characterisation brings humour into a serious plotline.

Charlie Lawson as Motel

This was a good supporting performance as the shy admirer of Tzeitel, unsure of how he can pursue her and unaware that the matchmaker already sees them as a perfect couple, were it not for the wealth of the butcher, Lazar Wolf, which could scupper the match. Your light-hearted solo, 'Miracle of miracles' was suitably cheerful and tunefully sung.

Nick Toop as Perchik

A believable pairing with Hodel as you seek Tevye's blessing, rather than his permission for you to marry. At the performance I attended, you faced a microphone failure at the very end of your duet. Well-done for carrying on regardless.

Josh Levy as Fyedka

As a young Russian soldier Fyedka has made it his business to be informed and to be involved. Sadly, having married Chava, he is unable to protect her village from destruction and has to leave alongside the Jewish families. A convincing performance, well done.

In conclusion:

The message of this musical is that physical evidence of tradition can be destroyed, but the emotional aspects will continue. Adaptation to change is sometimes necessary, but there are strong ties which bind people to their heritage. This is undoubtedly as much the basis of history today as when YAOS previously performed

the musical in 1980 and in 2000 and as it was thousands of years ago. Thank you to all involved for sharing your interpretation with the Yeovil audiences.

Fiddler on the Roof was both as moving and as entertaining, as I hoped it would be.

Jadi Carlyon

Adjudicator

David Beach Competition

31/3/2026