



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society

Name of Production: Fiddler on the Roof

Venue: Westlands Entertainment Venue, Yeovil

Date: 21st March 2026

Adjudicator: Gerry Parker

Compulsory reading for anyone involved in a production of this show should be the short stories contained in Sholem Aleichem's *Teveye and his Daughters*. They tell the full story of the family before and after the period covered in Joseph Stein's Book for *Fiddler on the Roof*, and whilst it is now fashionable to equate the story to present day Ukraine, where Aleichem was born in a village near Kyiv, there is an even sharper edge to the ethnic cleansing of the Tsar's pogroms than Vladimir Putin's attempts to draw the Ukraine back into the Soviet state.

A Jewish friend of mine who later played the Rabbi in a production of the show I was involved with, gave me a vivid picture of what those Pogroms meant to Jewish people living in a Tsarist state, telling the story of his grandfather, who walked from a small village near Kyiv to a Balkan port stowed away in a boat he thought would take him to America, only to be landed in England. Knowing no English, carrying the one possession he had brought with him from the Ukraine, a small silver cup, he then walked to Leeds, where he knew members of his family lived and founded his own family.

In both Aleichem's stories and Robert, my Jewish friends family history, the theme of Family ties and traditional values is the cement that holds the Jewish race together. And we must feel this from every player if the production is to reach the soul of this show. Even greater responsibility for creating the right atmosphere for the story to develop falls on the Director. It is not enough that with the aide of Choreographer and Musical Director a polished, well organised production is created, and this one certainly ticked all those boxes plus quite a few more, we have to believe that we are watching a small community of Russian Jews trying to live side by side with their far more powerful Russian neighbours. You cannot just act these characters we have to believe that from Nachan, the beggar to Teveye, the milkman these are real people.

Because there is so much natural humour in the first Act of this show there is a temptation to play the Act principally for fun. As Chaim Topol points out in his autobiography this can be a fatal error, because having been so lighthearted during that opening act it is extremely hard, indeed nigh on impossible, to make the audience believe in the seriousness of the events that take place in Act 2. No need therefore to underline any of the humorous lines with a thick indelible pencil. Aware of this, the Director relied on the good timing of the players to gain laughs in Act 1, Golde to Tevye, "I have something to, tell you, Why should today be different?", or Tevye's reply to Perchik's suggestion that rich people's wealth could be shared amongst all people, "That's nice, if they would agree, I would agree".

The result was a good balance between drama and comedy and some lovely smiles rather than outright laughs to enjoy in Act 2, Tevye's reply to a villager who suggest that they fight the Russian army, "We will fight, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", "Very good, that way the whole world will be blind and toothless", and the lovely last minute throw away from Tevye at the end of the Anatevka number when someone remarks that, "Our ancestors have been expelled at a moments notice from many such places." "Maybe that's why we always wear our hats".

The Anatevka number, like the Sabbath Prayer and Sunrise Sunset showed the ensemble work, and support from the orchestra at its best. The male ensemble took a little longer to get into their stride, 'To Life' requiring more energy to make it really flare into life. Whilst there was a great deal to admire in the way in which these numbers were lit, there was a slight question mark over the final moments of Act 1, where Tevye questions God as to why he had allowed the destruction of Tzeitel and Motel's feast, with Tevye left as a shadowy figure rather than the one outstanding feature on stage as the Act comes to its dramatic closure.

Designing a workable set in what is not an ideal theatrical space is a considerable challenge, and the smoothness with which each scene evolved is a tribute to the set designer/stage manager. Well chosen costumes, in which the company looked at ease, helped to create the right physical picture of Anatevka. It would have been nice to have seen a bigger cart for Tevye to do battle with, that being said I can appreciate with the problems of manoeuvring in the spaces available, the size that was chosen.

Thinking back on the production as a whole the picture is almost too smooth and efficient, with not enough of the harshness and poverty of the life of a minority Jewish community in a Tsarist turn of the ninetieth to twentieth century village showing through. The presentation, however, was of such quality that it was always a pleasure to watch and listen to, serving Sholem Aleichem's stories, Joseph Stein's book, Jerry Brock's music, and Sheldon Harnick's lyrics very well indeed.

Individual Performances

Tevye

If you translate the name Tevye from Yiddish, you come up with 'God is Good,' an appropriate name for a man who wholeheartedly believes that his religion and the traditions that go with it keep his people together no matter where they are or what troubles they encounter. For such a man to have a direct line to God is perfectly natural because he is not just a deity but a friend. He is also the epitome of a man growing older and finding it harder and harder to accept change. After all things are perfectly acceptable, if not perfect, as they are. A naturally intelligent man, he realises that there must be change, "On the other hand our old ways were once new", which leaves him open to acceptance of Tzeitel and Hodel's choice of partners. When it comes to Chava marrying outside the faith it is asking too much, "If I bend that far I'll break".

One of the great roles in musical theatre it offers wonderful opportunities, dramatically and vocally, as long as you remember to act out the lyrics rather than use them to show off your vocal ability. Moments of comedy, poignancy and true drama are all there, "This is still my home, my land, get off my land." If you use Tevye as a vehicle to show off your acting and vocal talents we lose the essence of this wonderful character. Fortunately, apart from one or two self-indulgent moments when the temptation to take advantage of these wonderful theatrical opportunities and openly display your fine dramatic and vocal talents shone through, we saw the heart and soul of this man who would always put his God, and family first in all things.

Golde

Married to a romantic dreamer, Golde is the practical one in the family. Like Tevye she would like a learned man as husband for her children, but first and foremost one with the wherewithal to take care of them. You depicted this, on the surface rather cold practical woman, but as you showed in the delicately sung, 'Do you love me' there was a deep love for your at times intractable husband. As shown in the dealings with Chava's wedding to Fyedka and subsequent family breakup of the family, a mother's true love for her children is even stronger than her love of Jewish tradition.

There were some nice comedy moments, those conversations with Yente, and that lovely spat outside of Motel's shop when you inform Tevye that yes, he scares you, "When I get home I'll faint", and "I have to sweep the floor, I don't want to leave a dirty house". Compared to some Golde's one has seen, a more polished character, but one who rang true throughout.

Tzeitel / Hodel / Chava

It is a pity that the delightful, 'Matchmaker' is the only chance we have to hear this trio vocally and watch them show off their talents in the art of terpsichore to the full. Following this good introduction to the trio, three distinctive characters emerged. There was a nice air of the elder sister about Tzeitel in the way in which she led her younger

siblings through the prospect of marriage. The frustration at Motel's dithering and lack of backbone when it came to facing Tevye was equally well portrayed. There was room however for a little more show of desperation when pleading with her father not to marry Lazar Wolf. Tevye's views on the subject are quite entrenched and it needs something very strong to force him to change his mind and allow the marriage.

The independence that first drives Hodel to throw her cap at the Rabbi's son, and then gives her the strength to first challenge Perchik's views on life and then follow him to Siberia, were always on view. As was the pain on the railway halt singing, 'Far from the home I love', at the thought of leaving your family and the home you love.

The development of the deep seated love between Chava and Fyedka, a love that will have to face untold prejudices if it is to survive, is an extremely difficult one to show. There is so little time and dialogue given to such an extremely difficult subject, and therefore it says much for the way in which this character was built that we always were sympathetic towards her predicament. More could have been made of the dance opportunities in the poignant 'Little Bird' number, opportunities I am sure you and the others would have taken advantage of.

Fyedka / Rifka / Yussel / Sasha

I bring this trio into the adjudication at this spot because of the obvious tie up between Fyedka and Chava. His intervention when his fellow Russians were teasing and bullying Chava was nicely timed, as was his joking introduction of himself to this young Jewish girl. There was a good feeling that for all that he was broadminded enough to accept Chava as his wife, he was always aware that a 'them and us' relationship existed between Jews and Russians at this time.

You can equate Rifka, Yussel and Sasha, to southern state 'Red Necks' and the local Black community. They felt themselves superior beings, and showed no signs of having any second thoughts on the matter. What we could have done with is at least six more of their kind to make them more of a physical threat in the trashing of Tzeitel's wedding and the 'To Life' number.

Shprintze / Bielke

Children, especially little girls, should in this period be seen and not heard. Whilst this pair admirably fitted that bill, they also gave the distinct impression that there were two very lively youngsters ready to burst out from such restrictions. They took the limited opportunities on offer with great alacrity and clearly showed the Director, Choreographer and MD that there was a great deal of talent waiting in the wings to be unleashed.

Yente

One of those gorgeous roles that can be played to the full and unless you really 'ham it up', and there was no question of that happening in this case, impossible to overplay. It is a role to relish, with some lovely laugh lines on hand and physical moments of comedy to exploit. Not for nothing was the famous Jewish actress, Molly Picon, chosen to play Yente in the film version, because there are also moments of deep poignancy in the role. You brought out the sorrow and loneliness of Yente when you told Golde about your plans to get to Jerusalem next year in the Holy Land. As the words came tumbling out, more, we felt to convince yourself than Golde, there was sadness that probably for all your determination, that this frail elderly woman would never make it to The Holy Land.

Motel / Perchik

Two suitors facing the same problem of convincing a very reluctant parent to give permission for their marriages going about the process in very different ways. The diffident Motel, something you displayed in a subtle manner, with an unexpected steely resolve hidden behind this façade, 'Even a poor tailor is entitled to some happiness'. Unambitious, except for the welfare of his family, this Motel left you with the impression that he would make it to America, and be a successful small scale businessman. Just where the firebrand, "I will change the world", Perchik would end up is far more difficult to predict. One thing is certain, that the politically determined man you created would not shy away from any challenge that came before him. At the same time there was a good show of vulnerability in the way in which Hodel showed you that there was far more to marriage than a political theory. She looked an ideal partner for you and unless you died in a labour camp your Perchik could well become a world leader.

Lazar Wolf

In many ways the most likable and certainly the most 'put upon' character in the show. A successful local businessman, lonely since the death of his wife, and well aware that he is rather an old bridegroom for Tzeitel, but at the same time believes that he can give her a good happy life. You brought the inner warmth of Lazar to the table and a genuine sense of hurt at the way in which Tevye twisted his way out of their agreement for the hand of his eldest daughter. There was true sadness in the thought that his future lay in joining his brother in law in Chicago, "I hate him, but a relative is a relative". There was also a lasting impression that even at his advancing years this quietly strong character would again build a successful business in America.

Constable

The equivalent of the old style, British Village Bobby, the Constable, whilst as you showed when issuing the order for all the Jews to leave Anatevka, feels superior to that minority race, has respect for Tevye and the traditions he represents. You showed a

good sense of regret at having to carry out the destruction of Tzeitel's wedding party and the Pogrom that would empty the village of Jews. This sense of authority came through when challenged, "We will fight, a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye," in a characterisation that was at times a little too underplayed, but one which always rang true.

Grandma Tzeitel / Fruma Sarah

When you have the facilities to fly in the ghostly Fruma Sarah and raise Grandma from the grave, the characters are all but drawn for you before a word is sung or spoken. One Fruma Sarah I remember was flown in with such ferocity that she bounced, with an accompanying involuntary screen, onto the stage floor before bursting into song. With no such aides this pair establish their characters at a moment's notice, and made sure that they stayed firmly in place throughout the fanatically paced dream scene.

Shaindel / Avram / Mordcha / Nachum

"And what is wrong with my son, Mote," retorts Shaindel when another of the villagers makes a disparaging remark about him. A mother immediately ready to defend her young, a pity for you there was no more dialogue or solo music to help you build the character.

Avram, the bookseller, the village gossip, one of the few who can read, "Why don't you bring us some good news". There was a nice sense of nervousness about this Avram forever being berated for reading bad news from the papers.

Mendel, "A wedding would not be a wedding without you and your little fee", the local tavern owner, and, for a fee MC at village functions, there was rightly a sense of the showman about this Mordcha.

Nachum, an experienced beggar, the man you drew would indeed complain that this week he received only one kopek instead of the usual two, "So you has a bad week, why should I suffer".

Rabbi / Mendel

A little more teasing of the Rabbi in the wedding dance sequence would not have been amiss, otherwise the respect and reaction to this figure of such authority in the Jewish community was firmly in place, and this well-drawn, elderly Rabbi deserved such a response.

Mendel, his son would indeed be quite a catch for any local girl, so why would Hadel not sey her cap at such a match? You handled the comedy feed lines for Tevye well when he misquoted the Good Book, playing the straight man ideally. `

Fiddler

The director chose to bring the Fiddler into the action a little more than is often seen, and you responded well to this challenge. That being said, there is some merit in keeping him as a more remote character until that final moment when, after consulting with God, Tevye invites The Fiddler to join him and his family on a new adventure in America, bringing with him the traditions that keep this race together no matter where they find themselves.

Ensemble

Whether in small groups, as in the beautifully set and lit, 'Sabbath Prayer', or just acting as a backing, this fully committed group were always a plus to whatever scene they were involved in. It says a great deal for the planning of the Director and Choreographer that their entrances and exits in this difficult setting rarely looked anything but natural and attractive. The quality of their vocal input underlines the work done in rehearsal with the MD.

Thank you for the warm welcome, much appreciated interval hospitality and most enjoyable opportunities to catch up with the latest news of YAOS and this production in particular.

Gerry Parker