



Society : Crowthorne Musical Players
Production : **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**
Date : 25th May 2013
Venue : Wilde Theatre, South Hill Park, Bracknell
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, District 14

Report

Fiddler on the Roof is a musical by Jerry Bock with lyrics by Sheldon Harnick and book by Joseph Stein, first opened on Broadway in 1964 where it was first show to surpass 3,000 performances. The story centres on Tevye who is raising his five daughters in Tsarist 1905 Russia whilst maintaining his Jewish faith against the changes in the modern world.

Conflicts arise when each of his older daughters find husbands themselves and therefore breaking the tradition of having their grooms found for them by a matchmaker.

CMP's production had very good pace, with everyone knowing their lines, cues and entrances. The show was enhanced by excellent lighting design and effective staging. The principal singing was of high standard and maintained throughout the show. I felt the dancing was not quite as fluid as it could have been, but considering this was the last performance of the run, and the second performance of the day, then the cast can be excused. I felt that the issue is more to the restrictions enforced on the performances by the rights holders and less by the skills of the choreographer.

Overall, this was an entertaining production with many enjoyable performances from a talented group.

MARK CONOLLY (Tevye)

Unfortunately everyone compares the role of Tevye to the superb performances by Chaim Topol in the 1971 film. Mark certainly gave some of his own interpretations into the part, particularly in *If I Was A Rich Man*. Mark and Melinda had very good rapport as husband and wife. It seemed to me that having played in this show before clearly helped their understanding of their characters and of their relationship with each other. I did feel that Mark looked down a little too much, especially at the beginning, which meant that from my elevated position on the third level, I could not see any facial expressions, only the top of your hat. Mark phrased his lines wonderfully - for example his reaction on accepting Motel's request to marry Tzeitel, the "I am sorry already" was superbly weighted with very good comic effect. Mark's singing was excellent – with very good rhythm and nice touches of colour to his tone. Overall, this was a very good performance in a demanding role.

MELINDA BENNETT (Golde)

Melinda produced a nice characterisation of Golde, Tevye's long suffering wife. There was excellent rapport between her and Mark that enabled the humour of the lines to be realised through performance. Her singing was very good and I enjoyed *Do You Love Me* and the lovely *Sabbath's Prayer*.

CATHERINE HAZELL (Tzeitel)

Catherine produced a splendidly confident performance as the eldest daughter. Her singing in *Matchmaker* was very clear. I enjoyed the chemistry between her and Motel, her intended. Catherine's movements around the stage looked entirely natural and produced a very believable performance.

CAT SIMMONDS (Hodel)

I was surprised to read that this was Cat's performance debut, so congratulations on a fine performance. I thought *Far from the home I Love* was very well sung, with clear and precise phrasing. I think you needed a few more facial expressions, especially in the more tense scenes (the proposal scene with Perchik, for example). The expressions just needed to be bigger so that they could be seen by the audience and not just on stage. Your movement around stage looked natural and comfortable. Overall you should be very pleased with this, your first performance and look forward to seeing you in many more productions in future.

TASHA EDEN (Chava)

There were some lovely moments from Tasha, playing the middle daughter Chava. She sang very competently in *Matchmaker*. Personally I would have liked to see the character played a little shyer, especially when she first meets Fydeka in the bookshop. The pace in the last scene felt a little rushed and would have loved to see a bigger change when we realised that Tevye speaks (albeit it through the rest of the family) to her at the end. This is big moment in the show where Tevye relents and slowly accepts the changes around him. However, Tasha understood the anguish superbly and her acting in the scene when she is reject by her Papa was superbly performed.

ANGIE CHITTY (Yente)

This was a wonderful characterisation played by Angie as matchmaking Yente. I loved her scurrying movement, along with her walking stick, as she moved about the stage. It added character and made me laugh each time. It also gave the opportunity for the girls to mimic in *Matchmaker*.

TONY COLLINS (Lazar Wolf)

This is a lovely character part that offers some good comedy when played straight. The scene in the Inn, when Tevye misunderstood his intentions, was perfectly performed and extracted the humour very well indeed. Tony's singing was very good and strong. His performance in the wedding was equally played, again producing good humour through very well presented lines.

ALI BAGSHAW (Motel)

Ali produced an admirable performance as the tailor Motel. Producing the nervous suitor in the opening scene and then showing good contrast later when he finally finds his voice and confidence when seeking permission to marry Tzeitel. I enjoyed his confident and enjoyable performance of *Miracles of Miracles*.

JOSH VINCE (Perchik)

The part of the student was very well played by Josh. He understood perfectly the role of the militant student. There were nice touches of awkwardness during his proposal to Hodel. He sang *Now I Have Everything* with Hodel was sung very confidently.

JON KERR (Fyedka)

There were some lovely moments with Tasha's Chava. The book scene was a little underplayed and I felt he should be a little more confident, displaying a contrast between him and Chava. However, this is a personal view and Jon's portrayal did work.

DEBBIE MANN (Fruma-Sarah)

I loved the dream scene, and in particular the role of Fruma-Sarah who wandered around the stage several feet taller than everyone else. Debbie performed the role superbly, and it could not have been easy moving around the stage on stilts, but it looked extremely effective.

CHORUS

The chorus produced a lovely, good, strong opening with the song *Tradition*. On the whole, the movement looked very well rehearsed but there were a few moments of indecision by a couple of people that meant it was not as polished as it could have been. But the singing was very well presented and the later songs *Sabbath's Prayer* and *Sunrise, Sunset* very well performed. I enjoyed the characterisation that the chorus found, that was apparent during the opening number for each of the groups (mamas, papas, boys and girls etc). The movement and imaginative approach to the dream sequence was very effective and the chorus should be praised for their ensemble work that was probably incredibly difficult but looked impressive.

Musical Director (NICK AUSTIN)

The singing by CMP was once again was very good, with all the principal performers very strong and comfortable. On the night I watched the orchestra overwhelmed the singers, which is probably more to do with the mixing of the sound. Some of the performers were fine, but I did struggle to hear most of the soloists. I read in the programme that after 25 years and 60 performances, Nick is handing the baton over to someone else. May I wish Nick an enjoyable retirement and hope CMP fine some with someone with the same enthusiasm and skills. Well done Nick, you should be very proud bowing out on such a high as this was a wonderfully performed show.

Director (LUCY SEYMOUR)

Overall this was a entertaining, well disciplined show. All the principal parts were very well cast and looked perfect matches. I did notice that the men wandered into a line, just before Perchik made his entrance, but this was a small indiscretion in another wise perfectly directed show, with entrances and exits very well executed by all. As I mentioned elsewhere, I felt the last scene a little rushed and I would have liked a little more tension before Tevye eventually "talked" to Chava, but this is personal view and the scene worked very well as it was.

Stage Management (ALAN SMITH, CHRISTINE STANFORD)

DSM (Susan Nicholson)

The scene changes were swiftly executed, without any issues. Houses were opened and closed promptly; items were introduced and struck with efficiency – all allowing for the pace of the show to continue. Well done to Alan, Christine and their crew for a well run stage crew.

Set

The set was simply but effectively presented. An excellent painted backdrop of sky with clouds was framed by some fencing, both painted on the backdrop and built onto the stage. The outside of the house was positioned stage left and was opened to reveal the inside of the house. This allowed for speedy scene changes. The house was on a truck with wheels so could easily be moved off stage for some scenes (the wedding, inside the Inn, for example). Along with Michael Brenkley's lighting design, the set was creative and functional.

Sound (CLIVE STANLEY)

On the night I watched I felt that some of the singers were overwhelmed by the sound of the orchestra. This was a huge shame, as some of the vocals I missed completely. This seemed to affect some performers more than others which indicated an issue with the mixing rather than the performers or the sound equipment. However, the majority of the musical numbers I did hear sufficiently and it did not disrupt my enjoyment of the show.

Lighting (MICHAEL BRENKLEY)

Michael produced some imaginative lighting effects that enhanced this production. The setting of the sun was very effective during the *Sabbath Prayer*, in scene 3, portraying some wonderful pink, reds and blue colours to the back drop before, slowly, moving to darkness. Then, once night had arrived, we were treated to a starlit sky and lit candles. During another night scene, a moon appeared. The use of spots for the soloists worked well, particularly during Tevyes "on the other hand" decisions. On a couple of occasions the actors did not find the spot, which was a shame, but the design and cue execution could not be faulted.

Wardrobe and Costumes (JANET WINN)

Good costumers that looked appropriate to the characters – whether they were Russian guards or Jewish peasants. I liked the idea of the chorus all being in white for the dream sequence although some of the costumes were a little thin and under the lights I could see their "other" costumes underneath. I liked the design though, and it certainly was enhanced with the white face masks worn by the cast members – overall this scene was very effective.

Choreography (ERIN HOPE PHARO)

I always sympathise with any choreographer who sets *Fiddler on the Roof* as so many of the numbers and moves are preset as a condition of the performing licence, therefore restricting the artistic talents of the choreographer. On the whole the cast fulfilled the predefined moves well enough I but felt that a little more practise was needed in some numbers with some cast members turning the wrong way or out of step with the rest. This is extremely picky – but I felt the dancing was not as polished as the previous performance I witnessed for CMP's *Hello Dolly*. There were some lovely moments though; for example an excellent bottle dance (congratulations to the dancers concerned keeping the bottles on their head!) Also, I liked the swapping on mops during *Matchmaker* on the appropriate lines – a nice idea that was cleanly executed by both performers. The dance for Hodel and Perchik used the stage area very well, not easy when you have just two people on stage, but the movement was very well defined and executed.

Programme

The 24 paged programme was crammed with interesting articles (about the background of the show), cast profiles, an interesting piece on Nick Austin. It also contained the useful list of scene and musical numbers.

I know that I have been quite picky with some aspects of this production but overall I must emphasise that I thoroughly enjoyed the show. The principals all had strong, believable and definable characters; sung very well; and moved perfectly naturally around the stage. The scenery worked very well with very well managed changes. The lighting plot was imaginative and added to the overall production. The chorus were on the whole very well disciplined. I enjoyed the evening and look forward to their future shows, *Times of Our Life*, in October and *The Witches of Eastwick* next March.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Bird', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gordon Bird
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