

A Study Guide

Of

Fiddler on the Roof

Music by Jerry Bock

Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

Book by Joseph Stein

FORT WAYNE CIVIC THEATRE

IN THE WINGS

Arts-In-Education Program

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The Original Book

Fiddler on the Roof is based on Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye the Dairyman" short stories.

Sholem Aleichem

Sholem Aleichem, the most beloved classical Yiddish writer, was born Sholem Rabinovitz in 1859 in Pereyaslav, Ukraine. His father--a merchant--was interested in the Russian Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), and the young Sholem was exposed to modern modes of thinking in addition to traditional Judaism. Sholem attended the *heder* (Jewish school) in Voronkov, the town his family moved to when he was young, and in his teenage years he graduated with distinction from a Russian gymnasium.

Like his contemporaries Mendele Mokher-Sefarim and I.L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem originally wrote in Hebrew, and he contributed to a number of Hebrew weeklies. Hebrew was the traditional language of Jewish scholarship, and it was considered more sophisticated than Yiddish--the language of the people. Indeed, when the 24-year old Sholem Rabinovitch published his first Yiddish story, "Tsvey Shteyner" ("Two Stones"), he used the pseudonym Sholem Aleichem to disguise himself from his father, who Sholem supposed would be disturbed by his choice of language.

But Sholem Aleichem found his voice in Yiddish. His writing, though far from unsophisticated, was about the masses and for the masses. "Sholem Aleichem" was more than just a pen name. Sholem Aleichem was Sholem Rabinovitch's tragic-comic persona, a character who mediated the tales of the people to the people. The name itself is significant. "Sholem Aleichem" is a Hebrew greeting, meaning literally "Peace be upon you," but a more appropriate translation might be: "What's up?" Sholem Aleichem's work was a dialogue with the people written in a verbal and cultural language that would have maximum resonance.

This literary attitude manifested itself in the structure of Sholem Aleichem's work as well. Though Sholem Aleichem wrote novels and plays, he is perhaps best remembered for his fictional confessions, letters, and monologues, written in the voice of the simple religious Jew. As Harvard Yiddish scholar Ruth Wisse has written, "Just as Samuel Richardson and Daniel Defoe used 'discovered' diaries and letters, pseudobiography... to win the trust of new English readers by insisting their books delivered other people's words, so too did Sholem Aleichem often present himself as the intermediary between his characters and his readers to attest to the actuality of his creations."

One such character was Menakhem-Mendl, whose "letters" Sholem Aleichem first published in 1892. Menakhem-Mendl is a *schlimazel* (habitually unlucky person) who travels through Russia with his wife, Sheyne Sheyndel, trying to make his fortune with failed scheme after failed scheme.

A similar theme is evident in the earliest tale about Sholem Aleichem's most famous protagonist: Tevye the Dairyman, the basis for the show and film *Fiddler on the Roof*. The first Tevye story, "Tevye Strikes it Rich," was a monologue, published in 1894. In it, Tevye tells us how he earned enough money to set up a dairy. On his way home from a day working in the fields, he came across a woman and her daughter who are lost. After getting over the fear that they are demons, he escorts them home and is rewarded for his heroism. But his luck doesn't last long. In the second Tevye story, "The Bubble Bursts," published in 1899, the bubble bursts. Tevye is brought into a doomed money-making scheme by none other than Menakhem-Mendl, who is a relative of Tevye's (by marriage twice removed).

Of course, all of this is ample material for comedy. But aside from his farcical plots, Sholem Aleichem also employed stylistic humor. In a classically rabbinic manner, Tevye lives his life intertextually, sprinkling his speeches with biblical verses. Oftentimes, Tevye mangles these verses, and though some believe Sholem Aleichem created Tevye this way to present him as an ignorant Jew, it's more likely that the humor is not in Tevye's naivete, but in our not knowing when he is purposefully misquoting and when he isn't.

Because of the humorous elements in his writing, Sholem Aleichem is often thought of as a comic writer, but there is an undeniable darkness to his work. The great critic Irving Howe wrote: "As

I read story after story, I find that as the Yiddish proverb has it, 'a Jew's joy is not without fright,' even that great Jew who has in his stories brought us more joy than anyone else... a clock strikes 13, a hapless young man drags a corpse from place to place, a tailor is driven mad by the treachery of his perceptions, the order of *shtetl* life is undone even on Yom Kippur, Jewish children torment their teacher unto sickness. And on and on."

Sholem Aleichem connected with a vast chunk of world Jewry. He reached an unprecedented level of fame in his lifetime. Jews from all around the world and of all religious backgrounds read his work. He lived in many places as well. In 1906, Sholem Aleichem left Kiev after the pogroms there and went to live in Lemberg. Then he left for New York, where he hoped to make a living writing and staging plays. But New York was a financial failure for him, and he returned to Europe and was forced to do reading tours to support himself. Sholem Aleichem soon fell ill with tuberculosis, which would plague him for the last eight years of his life.

And yet these physical and financial difficulties were wholly incommensurate with his popularity. Sholem Aleichem's 50th birthday in 1909 was celebrated all around the world, and when he returned to New York in 1914, he was welcomed with a party at Carnegie Hall. As Howe put it, "Every Jew who could read Yiddish, whether he was orthodox or secular, conservative or radical, loved Sholem Aleichem, for he heard in his stories the charm and melody of a common *shprakh*, the language that bound all together."

Sholem Aleichem was a prolific writer. He wrote six novels between 1884 and 1890 alone. He wrote romantic novels and political ones. (He was affiliated with the burgeoning Zionist movement, and in 1898, published part of a Zionist novel named *Moshiekhs Tsaytn, The Times of the Messiah*). In 1894, the same year the first Tevye monologue appeared, Sholem Aleichem published his first full-length play, *Yaknehoz*. Later plays included a stage version of his romantic novel *Stempenyu*, produced during his disappointing residence in New York, and *Di Goldgreber (The Gold Diggers)*, which he wrote in Berlin after leaving New York.

Sholem Aleichem was not just a writer of Yiddish fiction. He was also one of its most devoted advocates. In the late 1880s, Sholem Aleichem founded (and funded) *Di Yidische Folksbibliotek*, an annual journal that published the works of most of the important writers of the period, including Mendele Mokher Seforim and I.L. Peretz. He brought prominence to Yiddish writing that would have been unfathomable to his literary ancestors.

Sholem Aleichem died in New York on May 13, 1916. For many years, his readership continued to grow, particularly through the Hebrew translations composed by his son-in-law, Y.D. Berkowitz. Sholem Aleichem, named after a ubiquitous Jewish greeting, had become--and perhaps still is--the ubiquitous name of Jewish literature.

Passage from *Tevye the Dairyman*

"You can see that I tried to make light of it, though my heart was weeping inside me. But Tevye is no woman; Tevye kept a stiff upper lip. And she, my Hodl, was not to be outdone by me. She answered whatever I said point by point, quietly, calmly, intelligently. Say what you will about them, Tevye's daughters can talk! ...Her voice shook dully, and even with my eyes shut, I felt that I could see her, that I could see my Hodl's face that was as pale and worn as the moon...Should I have thrown myself on her, had a fit, begged her not to go? But I could see it was a lost cause. Damn them all, every one of those daughters of mine - when they fall for someone, they do it hook, line, and sinker!"

Review Essay of *Tevye the Dairyman*

Like the Ancient Mariner, Tevye the Dairyman grabs a listener - in his case, his creator, Sholem Aleichem - and tells a tale. The comparison may seem strange; unlike the Coleridge character, Tevye is funny, warm, learned, earthy, and hopeful. Still, both the Ancient Mariner and Tevye tell stories of ruin: the Mariner, of his ship; Tevye, first, of all the assumptions that sustain his world, and

then of the world itself.

Sholem Aleichem didn't conceive of a novel when he wrote his first Tevye short story, and the novel doesn't really get going as an organic narrative until the third chapter. But the first two episodes, "Tevye Strikes it Rich" and "Tevye Blows a Small Fortune," introduce us to Tevye's two favorite subjects: God and money. As it happens Tevye holds complicated views on these subjects. On the one hand he's a traditional man, trying to hang on to the religious and economic culture that sustained his people for generations. On the other hand - and, in many ways this is his tragedy - he's not unsympathetic to the revolutionary ideas that will ultimately destroy him and his family.

In the first story, "Tevye Strikes it Rich," Tevye shows both his pious and radical sides. When evening comes, he follows the commandment to pray, commenting, "a Jew prays when he must, not when he wants to." But, in one of the funniest scenes in Yiddish literature, he laces the traditional prayers with notably impious demands and complaints. "'See us in our affliction,'" he recites, and then adds "take a good look at us poor folk slaving away and do something about it, because if You don't, just who do You think will?" "'Bless the fruits of this year'" he continues, then adding "Kindly arrange a good harvest of corn, wheat, and barley, although what good it will do me is more than I can say: does it make any difference to my horse, I ask you, if the oats I can't afford to buy him are expensive or cheap?"

In "Tevye Loses a Small Fortune," Tevye catches the capitalist bug raging through pre-revolutionary Russia - what he calls "the itch to be rich." But when he loses his savings, he returns quickly to more Jewishly traditional views of money, waxing philosophically, "If we blew a small fortune, that's only because we weren't meant to make a big one." "Money is a lot of baloney," he comments at the end.

In each of the subsequent stories, revolutionary changes rob Tevye first of each of his daughters, then ultimately of his entire way of life. "Today's Children," the third story, commences the portrait of a world where traditional sources of authority gradually lose their grip. Tevye's daughter Tsaitl and Motl the tailor outrage Tevye by arranging their own marriage. "Are you crazy," Tevye screams at Motl. "Since when can you be the matchmaker, the father-in-law, and the groom all rolled into one? I suppose you want to be the rabbi and the bandleader too!" Once again, however, Tevye displays both of his sympathies. Despite his fulminations, he readily accepts the marriage, even preferring the gentle Motl to the old butcher Layzar Wolf.

In "Hodl," it's the political revolutionary Perchick who steals Tevye's second daughter. Again, Tevye doesn't know quite what to make of the socialists. He ridicules the revolutionaries to Hodl, viciously mocking how they call themselves "honorable," while refusing even to speak with their parents. Tevye gets his ideas about "honoring" from the fifth commandment. On the other hand, like a good socialist, Tevye spends much of the novel railing against the rich Jews of Boiberick. "Hodl," in fact, best captures Tevye's intellectual dilemma. Looking at the world with open eyes, Tevye grudgingly admits that change must come. He also understands that change will come, while finally seeing clearly that change will destroy his world.

In "Chava," the third daughter marries a non-Jew, and Tevye denounces her as "dead" (though he also finds himself, in the privacy of his thoughts, pondering "What did being a Jew or not a Jew matter?"). In "Shprintze," Tevye's fourth daughter literally dies. Her radical egalitarian ideas allow her to believe that she could marry a man outside her class. Disappointment when her beloved's uncle nixes the marriage kills her. In "Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel," it's Bielke, Tevye's fifth daughter, who catches capitalist fever. For the money alone, she marries a rich Jew - a godless lout, contemptuous of Jewish tradition. Here, it's not the daughter who leaves; it's Tevye who's tossed out of Russia by his own son-in-law.

"Lekh Lekho," the last story, completes the picture of revolutionary transformation. Tevye now faces a world devoid of both morality and rationality. When Tevye's gentile neighbors come to wreck his home, he reminds them - to no avail - "You know there's a God above, don't you?" When a policeman shows up with the order expelling him (and all Jews) from town, Tevye asks "In all the years you've been the law around here, have you ever heard a single soul in the village complain that I

stole anything, or pilfered anything or cheated anyone, or took the smallest item...?" Tevye's appeals to God and common sense - the pillars of his old world - fall on deaf ears. The old world has died.

Tevye, however, doesn't die along with it. Like a raging flood, history sweeps away the shtetls, but somehow Tevye stays afloat. Partly, this is because of his sense of humor, but mostly it's his faith. Tevye argues with God, berates God, scolds God like a nagging wife, but never breaks with God. Tevye holds God responsible for all his losses but he never denies God; for Tevye, as Hillel Halkin writes in the introduction, "to curse God is to die." Tevye is no theologian inventing excuses for God, or philosophical systems that explain God's behavior. He believes because he believes, believing even when God doesn't deserve it. And it's this existential, almost post-modern, faith that saves him. "The old God of Israel still lives!" he assures Sholem Aleichem, in the last line of the book.

In the end, it's faith that distinguishes Tevye from *The Ancient Mariner*. Both characters lose everything and survive to tell the tale, but for Tevye survival is no great trick; Jews have been doing that for two thousand years. Tevye loses everything, but instructs Sholem Aleichem to "say hello for me to all our Jews and tell them wherever they are, not to worry." With or without God's help, he perseveres. And it's that perseverance that's allowed us, Tevye's Jews, to weather the ravages of history and build new lives, far away from Tevye's old home.

The Show

Book by Joseph Stein

Joseph Stein was born on May 30, 1912, in New York City, the son of Charles and Emma (Rosenblum) Stein, who emigrated to the United States from Poland. Growing up in the Bronx, Stein's father read him the stories of Sholem Aleichem, a noted author of Jewish folk tales. Stein would remember these stories when he was called upon to develop the musical that became *Fiddler on the Roof*.



Stein did not immediately turn to the theater, though. He attended City College, earning his B.S.S. in 1935, then his Master of Social Work from Columbia in 1937. Stein then spent six years employed as a psychiatric social worker, from 1939 until 1945. In 1946, Stein began writing for radio. He wrote for such shows as the *Henry Morgan Show* and *Kraft Music Hall*. In 1948, he and writing partner Will Glickman began writing for the stage, contributing sketches to Broadway revues as well as whole plays and the books for musicals. Through 1958, every theatrical production Stein wrote was a collaboration with Glickman. In 1955, the duo had their biggest success with their first musical play, *Plain and Fancy*. Stein also wrote for television from 1950-62, primarily for variety shows such as *Your Show of Shows* and *The Sid Caesar Show* and specials for stars like Phil Silvers and Debbie Reynolds.

Adaptations of other people's material proved to be the highpoint of Stein's career. In 1959, he had his first solo success with an adaptation of Sean O'Casey's *Juno*. An even bigger hit was Stein's adaptation of Carl Reiner's autobiography *Enter Laughing* in 1963. The apex of Stein's stage career, however, was writing the book for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Though backers were originally reluctant to produce the musical fearing it might have limited appeal, *Fiddler* went on to become a smash hit. Stein won three major awards for his effort, including the Tony Award for best musical.

Stein continued to do well with adaptations. His next hit was the book for the 1968 musical *Zorba*, based on the novel *Zorba the Greek*. However, Stein's career was not as successful after that point, hitting a low in 1986. Stein wrote the book for the musical *Rags*, which was a continuation of the story told in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Unlike the original, *Rags* failed to catch on immediately and was a box office failure in its original five-day Broadway run. The musical did have some success Off-Broadway and in regional productions; it received a Tony Award nomination in 1987.

Stein was married to Sadie Singer until her death in 1974. The couple had three sons, Daniel, Harry, and Joshua. Stein remarried in 1976 to Elisa Loti, a former actress and psychotherapist.

Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

Born and raised in Chicago, Sheldon Harnick began studying the violin while in grammar school. After serving in the U.S. Army for three years, he enrolled in the Northwestern University School of Music, and earned a Bachelor of Music degree in 1949. Though his focus had been the violin, Harnick also developed skills as a writer of comedy sketches, songs and parody lyrics, and eventually decided to try his luck as a theatrical lyricist in New York City.

His first song in a Broadway show, "The Boston Beguine" for *New Faces of 1952*, introduced theatergoers to the wry, subtle humor and deft wordplay indicative of a Harnick lyric. Over the next several years he contributed lyrics or whole songs to such vintage revues as *John Murray Anderson's Almanac*, *The Shoestring Revue* and *The Littlest Revue*. A few more years were spent working on other writers' trouble-plagued Broadway-bound musicals before Harnick joined up with composer Jerry Bock to write their own musicals. While the first Bock & Harnick musical, *The Body Beautiful* in 1958 showed promise, it was their second musical, *FIORIELLO!* in 1959, that put the team on the map. Their musical biography of New York City's legendary mayor earned the Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize and New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.



In 1964 Bock & Harnick, working with director-choreographer Jerome Robbins and book writer Joseph Stein, created a musical masterpiece that vividly evoked a vanished community while telling a story with universal and timeless appeal. *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF*, based on a series of short stories by Jewish folklorist Sholom Alechem, earned the Tony Award, New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, a gold record (for both its Broadway cast album and film soundtrack recordings) and a platinum record (for the Broadway album).

Harnick's other collaborators in musical theatre have included: Michel Legrand, Mary Rodgers, Richard Rodgers, and Joe Raposo. Harnick has provided English-language librettos for classical operas and oratorios, including works by Stravinsky, Ravel, Mozart, Bach and Verdi. His original opera librettos include *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* (1975), music by Jack Beeson; *Love in Two Countries* (1991), music by Thomas A. Shepard; and *The Phantom Tollbooth* (1995), music by Arnold Black and based on Norton Juster's popular children's book. His work for television and film ranges from songs for the HBO animated film, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1991) with music by Stephen Lawrence, to lyrics for the opening number of the 1988 Academy Awards telecast. He wrote the theme songs for two films, both with music by Cy Coleman: *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) and *Blame it On Rio* (1984). Sheldon Harnick is a member of The Dramatists Guild and the Songwriters Guild of America. In addition to his Tonys, Pulitzer and Grammys, his many other honors include: The Johnny Mercer Award presented by the Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Marc Blizstein Memorial Award for achievement in the creation of opera librettos, presented by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and Honorary Doctorates of Humane Letters awarded by Illinois Wesleyan University, and Muskingum College.

Music by Jerry Bock

The composer of the Broadway successes *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Mr. Wonderful* and *Fiorello!* was born Jerrold Lewis Bock in New Haven, Connecticut on November 23, 1928. His family moved to Flushing, New York where Bock studied the piano from an early age and began writing music for various shows while still in high school. His first success came during his high school years, in the form of the musical comedy *My Dream*. As a senior at the University of Wisconsin, he scored the musical comedy, *Big as Life*, based on the legend of Paul Bunyan, and put on by Haresfoot, an all-male college musical society. Bock's collaborator was a fellow student, Larry Holofcener, who was to become a co-worker on Bock's early scores.

Returning to New York following college, Bock and Holofcener were fortunate in being selected to audition their skills for Max Liebman, a producer of early music variety shows for television. They passed the test and joined the staff of "The Admiral Broadway Revue," which later became "Your Show of Shows," starring one of the world's premiere comedy duos, Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca. The young writers wrote songs for the stars as well as the chorus and the Corps de Ballet. During the early 50s period, an introduction to the very well-known music publisher, Tommy Valando, resulted in Bock's debut Broadway vehicle, the score for *Catch a Star*. This was followed by song contributions to Tallulah Bankhead's *Ziegfeld Follies*, some pop-styled songs for Sarah Vaughan and Bob Manning and a score for a Columbia Pictures short, titled "Wonders of Manhattan," which won an honorable mention at The Cannes Film Festival. This highly frenetic period reached its peak, finally, when Jule Styne assigned the score of *Mr. Wonderful*, which was to star Sammy Davis, Jr., to Jerry Bock, Larry Holofcener, and ultimately to George David Weiss as well. Two songs from that score became standards, "Mr. Wonderful," and "Too Close for Comfort."



Two years later, the fruitful team of Bock and Sheldon Harnick was born, yielding eventually, five Broadway show scores in seven years, which stands as a record. The shows included *The Body Beautiful*, *Fiorello*, *Tenderloin*, *She Loves Me*, *The Apple Tree*, *The Rothschilds*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Jerry Bock also contributed one song per weekly broadcast of "Sing Something Special," a New York City Board of Education program on WNYE, which culminated in a special children's album for Golden Records. Jerry Bock is also an esteemed Inductee into the Theater Hall of Fame.

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Characters

- **Tevye:** the dairyman
- **Lazar Wolf:** the butcher
- **Grandma Tzeitel**
- **Golde:** his wife
- **Mordcha:** the innkeeper
- **Fruma-Sarah**
- **Tzeitel, Hodel, Chava, Shprintze, and Bielke:** his daughters
- **Rabbi**
- **Constable**
- **Mendel:** Rabbi's son
- **Fyedka**
- **Yente:** the matchmaker
- **Avram:** the bookseller
- **Shaindel:** Motel's mother
- **Motel:** the tailor
- **Nachum:** the beggar
- **The Fiddler**
- **Perchik:** the student
- **Villagers**

Setting

THE PLACE: Anatevka, a small village in Russia
 THE TIME: 1905, on the eve of the Russian revolutionary period

Musical Numbers

ACT I

1. Prologue – Tradition (Tevye, Golde, Sons, Daughters, Chorus)
2. Matchmaker (Hodel, Chava, Tzeitel)
3. If I Were a Rich Man (Tevye)
4. Sabbath Prayer (Tevye, Golde, Chorus)
5. To Life (Tevye, Lazar, Villagers, Russians)
6. Tevye's Monologue (Tevye)
7. Miracle of Miracles (Motel)
8. The Dream (Grandma, Rabbi, Tevye, Golde, Fruma-Sarah, Chorus)
9. Sunrise, Sunset (Tevye, Golde, Perchik, Hodel, Chorus)

ACT II

1. Entr'acte
2. Now I Have Everything (Perchik, Hodel)
3. Tevye's Rebuttal (Tevye)
4. Do You Love Me? (Tevye, Golde)
5. The Rumor (Yente, Mendel, Avram, Villagers)
6. Far From the Home I Love (Hodel)
7. Chava Sequence (Tevye, Chorus)
8. Anatevka (Golde, Yente, Lazar, Mendel, Avram, Chorus)

Synopsis

Prologue (Act One)

Tevye explains the role of God's law in providing balance in the villagers' lives (Tradition). He describes the inner circle of the community and the larger circle which includes the constable, the priest, and countless other authority figures. He explains, "We don't bother them and so far, they don't bother us." He ends by insisting that without their traditions, he and the other villagers would find their lives "as shaky as a fiddler on the roof."

Act One:

Tevye's daughters wonder if the matchmaker will ever find them the men of their dreams (Matchmaker). The matchmaker, Yente, tells Golde that she has selected the butcher Lazar Wolf as a match for Tzeitel. Tevye reflects on how much he wishes he had a small fortune (If I Were a Rich Man). A group of villagers, including an outsider, Perchik, approach him with news of a violent pogrom in a nearby village. Tevye invites Perchik, a young revolutionary student, to come to his home for Sabbath dinner and arranges for him to instruct his daughters. Motel, the tailor attempts to ask Tevye for Tzeitel's hand, but gets tongue-tied. The family and their guests welcome the Sabbath (Sabbath Prayer).

Tevye goes to meet Lazar Wolf, the butcher, and agrees to the match with Tzeitel. A boisterous celebration ensues involving the villagers and the Russians who also congregate in the tavern (L'Chaim). As Tevye staggers home, he meets the Constable, who warns him that a demonstration is going to be planned against the Jews of Anatevka. In his inebriation, Tevye conjures the fiddler, who plays his violin as Tevye dances his way home.

The next day, Tevye tells Tzeitel about her engagement to Lazar Wolf. Golde rejoices, but after she leaves, Motel tells Tevye that he and Tzeitel gave each other a pledge to marry. After a struggle with himself, Tevye agrees to their marriage. He leaves and Motel and Tzeitel rejoice (Miracle of Miracles). Tevye decides to manufacture a wild nightmare (The Dream) to convince Golde that the match with Lazar will result in Tzeitel's death at the hands of the ghost of the butcher's first wife,

Fruma-Sarah. Golde is so horrified that she insists on a marriage between Tzeitel and Motel.

The villagers are gossiping in the street about the mix-up in Tzeitel's wedding plans. As Chava enters Motel's tailor shop, a group of Russians on the street taunt her. Fyedka, a Russian youth, insists that they stop. After they leave, Fyedka follows Chava into the shop. He tries to speak with her, but leaves quickly when Motel enters. Motel places his wedding hat on his head.

The musicians lead us to the wedding. The company sings (Sunrise, Sunset) as the traditional Jewish ceremony takes place. To the villagers' dismay, Perchik asks Hodel to dance with him and she accepts, performing the forbidden act of dancing with a man. Everyone else follows suit. As the dance reaches a wild high point, the Constable and his men enter. They destroy everything in sight. Perchik grapples with a Russian and is hit with a club. The constable bows to Tevye and says, "I am genuinely sorry. You understand?" Tevye replies with mock courtesy, "Of course." The family begins to clean up after the destruction.

Prologue (Act Two)

Tevye chats with God about recent events.

Act Two:

Perchik tells Hodel that he is leaving to work for justice in Kiev. He proposes to her and she accepts (Now I Have Everything). He promises to send for her as soon as he can. Tevye approves in spite of his misgivings. After they leave, he asks Golde if she thinks their own arranged marriage has somehow also turned into a romance (Do You Love Me?).

On a village street, Yente tells Tzeitel she has seen Chava with Fyedka. The news Yente has gleaned from a letter from Perchik becomes gossip for the villagers, who turn it into a song that totally distorts the truth (The Rumor).

Tevye takes Hodel to the railroad station. She is going to Siberia where Perchik has been sent after his arrest (Far From the Home I Love).

The villagers are once again gossiping about a new arrival at Motel and Tzeitel's. At Motel's shop, we learn that the new arrival is a sewing machine. Fyedka and Chava speak outside the shop. She promises to speak to Tevye about their love for each other. Tevye appears and Chava tries to talk to him about Fyedka. Tevye refuses to listen to her and forbids her to ever to speak to him about Fyedka again.

The next day, Tevye returns home to learn from Golde that Chava and Fyedka have been married by the priest. Tevye says that Chava is dead to them. He sings of his love for Chava (Chava Sequence). When Chava appears to ask his acceptance, he cannot allow himself to answer her plea.

Yente is trying to fix up Tevye's remaining daughters with two boys as future husbands. The Constable brings the news that everyone in the town has to sell their houses and household goods and leave Anatevka in three days. As the villagers think of their future, they sing fondly of the village they are leaving (Anatevka).

The family is packing the wagon to leave. Tzeitel and Motel are staying in Warsaw until they have enough money to go to America. Hodel and Perchik are still in Siberia. Chava appears with Fyedka. Tevye refuses to acknowledge her. Chava explains that they are also leaving because they cannot stay among people who can do such things to others. They are going to Cracow. Tzeitel says goodbye to them and Tevye prompts Tzeitel to add, "God be with you!" Chava promises Golde she will write to her in America. Chava and Fyedka leave. Final goodbyes are said and Tevye begins pulling the wagon. Other villagers join the circle, including the fiddler. Tevye beckons to the fiddler to follow him. The fiddler tucks his fiddle under his arm and follows the group onstage as the curtain falls.

Awards & Nominations

Winner of 9 Tony Awards - 1965

- Best Musical
- Leading Actor: Zero Mostel
- Featured Actress: Maria Karnilova
- Author: Joseph Stein
- Producer: Harold Prince
- Director: Jerome Robbins
- Composer & Lyricist: Jerry Bock & Sheldon Harnick
- Costume Designer: Patricia Zipprodt
- Choreographer: Jerome Robbins

Winner of 3 Academy Awards - 1971

- Best Cinematography: Oswald Morris
- Best Sound Gordon McCallum and David Hildyard
- Music, Scoring: Adaptation and Original Song Score: John Williams

Trivia

- The original Broadway production ran from September 22, 1964 to July 2, 1972. It ran for 3,242 performances and was the longest running Broadway show at the time. It held this record until *Grease* surpassed it in 1979.
- A film version directed by Norman Jewison was released in 1971, starring Chaim Topol as Tevye. Topol won a Golden Globe for this role. Recently, he has reprised the role in the 2009 national tour of *Fiddler*. More information on the current tour can be found at www.fiddlerontour.com

Quotes

- **Tevye:** “Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as...as a fiddler on the roof!”
- **Mendel:** “Is there a proper blessing for the tsar?”
Rabbi: “A blessing for the tsar? Of course. May God bless and keep the Tsar...far away from us!”
- **Tevye:** [to God] “Dear God, did you have to make my poor old horse lose his shoe, just before the Sabbath? That wasn’t nice... It’s enough you pick on me, Tevye...bless him with five daughters, a life of poverty. What have you got against my horse? Sometimes I think when things are too quiet up there, you say to yourself: Let’s see, what kind of mischief can I play on my friend, Tevye?”
- **Tevye:** “As Abraham said, ‘I am a stranger in a strange land.’”
Mendel: “Moses said that.”
Tevye: “Forgive me. As King David put it, ‘I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’”
Mendel: “That was also Moses.”
Tevye: “For a man with a slow tongue, he talked a lot.”
- **Tzeitel:** “Motel, even a poor tailor is entitled to some happiness.”
- **Tevye:** [repeated line] “On the other hand...”
- **Perchik:** “Money is the world’s curse.”
Tevye: “May the Lord smite me with it! And may I never recover!”
- **Tevye:** “A bird may love a fish, but where would they build a home together?”

Reviews

The New York Times

Fiddler on the Roof

By HOWARD TAUBMAN - Published: September 23, 1964

It has been prophesied that the Broadway musical theater would take up the mantle of meaningfulness worn so carelessly by the American drama in recent years. *Fiddler on the Roof* does its bit to make good on this prophecy. The new musical, which opened last night at the Imperial Theater, is filled with laughter and tenderness. It catches the essence of a moment in history with sentiment and radiance. Compounded of the familiar materials of the musical theater-popular song, vivid dance movement, comedy and emotion-it combines and transcends them to arrive at an integrated achievement of uncommon quality.

The essential distinction of *Fiddler on the Roof* must be kept in mind even as one cavils at a point here or a detail there. For criticism of a work of this caliber, it must be remembered, is relative. If I wish that several of the musical numbers soared indigenously, if I find fault with a gesture that is Broadway rather than the world of Sholem Aleichem, if I deplore a conventional scene, it is because *Fiddler on the Roof* is so fine that it deserves counsels toward perfection.

But first to the things that are marvelously right. The book that Joseph Stein has drawn from the richly humorous and humane tales of Sholem Aleichem, the warm-hearted spokesman of the poor Jews in the Russian villages at the turn of the century, is faithful to its origins.

It touches honestly on the customs of the Jewish community in such a Russian village. Indeed, it goes beyond local color and lays bare in quick, moving strokes the sorrow of a people subject to sudden tempests of vandalism and, in the end, to eviction and exile from a place that had been home.

Although there is no time in a musical for a fully developed gallery of human portraits, *Fiddler on the Roof* manages to display several that have authentic character. The most arresting, of course, is that of Tevye, the humble dairyman whose blessings included a hardworking, if sharp-tongued, wife, five daughters and a native philosophical bent.

If Sholem Aleichem had known Zero Mostel, he would have chosen him, one is sure, for Tevye. Some years ago Mr. Mostel bestowed his imagination and incandescence on Tevye in an Off-Broadway and television version of Sholem Aleichem's stories. Now he has a whole evening for Tevye, and Tevye for him. They were ordained to be one.

Mr. Mostel looks as Tevye should. His full beard is a pious aureole for his shining countenance. The stringy ends of his prayer shawl hang from under his vest; the knees of his breeches are patched, and his boots are scuffed. On festive occasions he wears a skull cap and a kaftan that give him an appearance of bourgeois solidity. But he is too humble to put on airs.

A man of goodwill, Mr. Mostel often pauses to carry on a dialogue with himself, arguing both sides of a case with equal logic. He holds long conversations with God. Although his observations never are disrespectful, they call a spade a spade. "Send us the cure," he warns the Lord, "we got the sickness already."

When Maria Karnilova as his steadfast but blunt wife breaks in on one of these communions with a dry greeting, "Finally home, my bread-winner!" he is polite enough for a parting word to God, "I'll talk to You later."

Mr. Mostel does not keep his acting and singing or his walking and dancing in separate compartments. His Tevye is a unified, lyrical conception. With the exception of a grimace or a gesture several times that score easy laughs, Tevye stays in character.

The scope of this performance is summed up best in moments made eloquent through music and movement. When Mr. Mostel sings "If I Were a Rich Man," interpolating passages of cantillation in the manner of prayer, his Tevye is both devout and pungently realistic. When

Tevye chants a prayer as the good Golde tries to convey an item of vital news, Mr. Mostel is not only comic but evocative of an old way of life. When Tevye hears the horrifying word that his third daughter has run away with a gentile, Mr. Mostel dances his anguish in a flash of savage emotion.

The score by Jerry Bock and the lyrics by Sheldon Harnick at their best move the story along, enrich the mood and intensify the emotions. "Sabbath Prayer" is as hushed as a community at its devotions. "Sunrise, Sunset" is in the spirit of a traditional wedding under a canopy. When Tevye and Golde after twenty-five years of marriage ask themselves, "Do You Love Me?" the song has a touching angularity. But several of the other romantic tunes are merely routine.

Jerome Robbins has staged *Fiddler on the Roof* with sensitivity and fire. As his own choreographer, he weaves dance into action with subtlety and flaring theatricalism. The opening dance to a nostalgic song, "Tradition," has a ritual sweep. The dances at the wedding burst with vitality. A dream sequence is full of humor. And the choreographed farewells of the Jews leaving their Russian village have a poignancy that adds depth to *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Boris Aronson's sets provide a background that rings true; they give the work an unexpected dimension of beauty in scenes like "Sabbath Prayer," the wedding and the epilogue.

Joanna Merlin, Julia Migenes, Tanya Everett as three of the daughters, Beatrice Arthur as a busybody of a matchmaker, Austin Pendleton as a poor tailor, Bert Convy as a young radical, Michael Granger as a well-to-do butcher and Joe Ponazzecki as the gentile suitor are among those who sing and act with flavor.

Richness of flavor marks *Fiddler on the Roof*. Although it does not entirely eschew the stigmata of routine Broadway, it has an honest feeling for another place, time and people. And in Mr. Mostel's Tevye it has one of the most glowing creations in the history of the musical theater.

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Talkin' Broadway's BROADWAY REVIEWS

Fiddler on the Roof

by Matthew Murray - February 26, 2004

It doesn't take long for the revival of the 1964 musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, which just opened at the Minskoff, to find its defining statement. It's spoken by the philosophizing milkman Tevye at the end of the first song, "Tradition": "Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof!" Even with a few of those traditions visible onstage, this production is mighty shaky.

To find the reason, one need look no further than director David Leveaux. Yes, the man who thought *Nine* was about Lucite chairs, flying sheets, and splashing water also believes *Fiddler on the Roof* is about tilting floors, flying roofs, and the inveterate sorrow of humanity. Apparently, the idea that this show is about people experiencing tumultuous emotional and cultural changes didn't occur to him.

This makes watching the Sholom Aleichem-derived story about Tevye (Alfred Molina), his wife Golde (Randy Graff), and their daughters in the pre-revolution Russian town of Anatevka an often bewildering experience. One can't help but love the classic Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick score, with such great songs as "Matchmaker, Matchmaker" and "Sunrise, Sunset," or Joseph Stein's insightful, moving book, yet almost nothing about this production evokes real feelings of any sort.

Take the show's third standard, "If I Were a Rich Man." Traditionally a showpiece (and showstopper) for Tevye, it taps into hopes and dreams to which nearly everyone can relate. Yet, Molina delivers it without excitement as a surface-level musing, not an innate desire. The lack of any energy or conviction and the song's throw-away staging - complete with generic, indicative hand gestures - suggest the number was given little attention.

But the song is vital; its sentiment drives Tevye throughout much of the show. It leads him to arrange a marriage for his first daughter Tzeitel (Sally Murphy) to the wealthy butcher Lazar Wolf (David Wohl), which he must undo when Tzeitel professes her love for the poor tailor, Motel (John Cariani). When Tevye's second daughter, Hodel (Laura Michelle Kelly), falls in love with the poor student revolutionary Perchik (Robert Petkoff), Tevye loses his dream yet again. But Molina's reactions barely register. As each of his daughters break with their culture's long-held traditions, from the mild (Tzeitel marrying for love) to the severe (Chava, played by Tricia Paoluccio, falling in love with a non-Jewish Russian), there's no sense of loss. It never substantially matters to Molina or Graff, so it never matters to us.

Leveaux was apparently far more concerned with the physical production. Tom Pye's set exquisitely depicts a wasteland filled with barren trees (pay particular attention to the one growing through the tavern floor), and they're solemnly lit by Brian MacDevitt. The costumes created by Vicki Mortimer don't suggest poverty for Tevye, wealth for Lazar Wolf, or define specific characters in any other noticeable ways. The only exception is Tevye's elaborately conceived ruse to undo Tzeitel's engagement, a recounted dream that finds the ensemble emerging in Chagall-inspired costumes. It's visually appealing but meaningless; the wind machines, flying ladders and people, and the stage tilting at a precarious angle also ensure that no stray feelings encroach on this moment.

Nor do the actors, for the most part. Molina's an incessantly bland Tevye, singing passably, but with a distracting habit of looking at his feet while dancing. The normally wonderful Graff makes Golde a one-note matron less appropriate to Russia than Manhattan's Upper West Side. Nancy Opel, a late replacement for Barbara Barrie as the matchmaker Yente, finds quite a few laughs, but makes little impression overall. Murphy, Kelly, and Paoluccio sing well enough, but are mostly lacking in personality; Cariani, unduly spastic and modern, might do better without his.

The surprising standout is Petkoff, not only period appropriate but a magnetic onstage presence. He's dynamic throughout, whether toasting Tevye's good fortune during "To Life" (usually terrific but otherwise vapid here) or causing a commotion at Tzeitel's wedding by encouraging men and women to dance together. He's the one actor who makes you care about his character, and if his singing is a trifle underpowered, in every other way he gives the production's only Tony-caliber performance.

Last, but hardly least, is the choreography - many of Jerome Robbins's original dances have been recreated by Jonathan Butterell. This proves a dual-edged sword: Robbins's brilliant dances only serve to underscore how uninspired most of the rest of this production is. Moments like "Tradition" or the wedding bottle dance shine brightly, but while it's exciting when the men make it through the dance without dropping their precariously balanced bottles, that happens in college productions.

Magnificent choreography energetically performed means nothing without the feelings that set up those moments; when "Tradition" and "To Life" lack any sort of joy, something's seriously amiss. Transitions from speech to singing or dance are not arbitrary and should not be treated as such. Songs and dances not truthfully emerging from emotions, regardless of how technically polished they are, don't work in this show.

Neither does Bock and Harnick's new song, "Topsy-Turvy" for Yente and two other women. It doesn't advance the plot or Yente's character in any significant way, it just replaces "The Rumor" and makes the second act seem even drearier, offering no indication of the sense of lightness the people of Anatevka can find in their lives even at the darkest times.

Leveaux's demanding that one mediocre song be replaced by an equally mediocre one, and his choice to steep the production so fully in darkness and sadness, strongly suggest he doesn't understand or respect the material that has proven a cherished classic for almost 40 years. While that may be standard revival policy these days, *Fiddler on the Roof* should never - as Leveaux's production does - impress the eyes and ears while leaving the heart utterly cold.

Vocabulary

Match the words with their correct definitions.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Mazeltov _____ | 6) tsar _____ | 11) Kosher _____ |
| 2) Sabbath _____ | 7) Passover _____ | 12) pogrom _____ |
| 3) canopy _____ | 8) matchmaker _____ | 13) Israel _____ |
| 4) King Solomon _____ | 9) rabbi _____ | 14) Siberia _____ |
| 5) dowry _____ | 10) L'chaim _____ | 15) Reb _____ |

- a) a title of respect for a man, similar to 'Mr.'
- b) the emperor of Russia
- c) a Jewish holiday celebrating the Exodus and freedom from slavery of the Children of Israel
- d) a vast region on the eastern and North-Eastern part of the Russian Federation that held a series of labor camps called Gulags
- e) a piece of cloth held up by four poles that symbolizes a couple's first home together
- f) a planned killing of large numbers of people, usually done for reasons of race or religion
- g) the Holy Land
- h) Saturday, observed by Jews as the day of worship and rest
- i) a figure described in Middle Eastern scriptures as a wise ruler of an empire centered on the united Kingdom of Israel
- j) money or things that a woman gives to her husband when they marry (often things that can be used in the home)
- k) spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation; qualified to explain and apply Jewish law
- l) 'good fortune' in Hebrew
- m) someone who arranges marriages
- n) food that fulfills the requirements of Jewish dietary law; prepared in accordance with Jewish religious practices
- o) a word used to express good wishes just before drinking an alcoholic drink meaning "To life!"

Discussion Questions

- 1) When the three oldest daughters decided to choose their own husbands, Tzeitel begged her father to give permission, Hodel said she didn't want permission but wanted the father to give his approval, and Chava merely asked the father to "accept us." Which of them was being reasonable, and which were asking too much of their father? Explain your answer.
- 2) At the end, Tzeitel couldn't resist talking to her "traitor" sister, even though Tevye considered Chava "dead." Would it be easier for a *sister* or a *father* to love such a person? Why? Do you think Tevye should have said more, or was his blessing ("and God be with you") enough?
- 3) When should people be forgiven after they do something wrong? Can traitors be forgiven?
- 4) Must outside influences be blocked out entirely in order to safeguard tradition? Explain.
- 5) Do you think it is true that "money can't buy happiness"? Explain, using the story from the show.
- 6) Tevye disowns Chava for marrying a Christian. Intermarriage is common today, but it is oft cited as one cause of the decline of American Judaism. Perhaps intermarriage is not the end of the world, but is it something we should worry about? What do you think Tevye would say about this?
- 7) How does Tevye try to transmit his sense of Judaism to his daughters? What might he have done differently if he had sons?
- 8) Can "tradition" be updated? Is it possible to have new forms of tradition that are still authentic?
- 9) What kind of life do you imagine Tevye having in America?

**Do you have questions or comments about *Fiddler on the Roof*
or the Civic Theatre's production of it?
Join the discussion on Facebook: Fort Wayne Civic Theatre.**

Vocabulary Answers

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1) l | 6) b | 11) n |
| 2) h | 7) c | 12) f |
| 3) e | 8) m | 13) g |
| 4) i | 9) k | 14) d |
| 5) j | 10) o | 15) a |

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