

Review: 'Fiddler on the Roof' at the Paramount Theatre

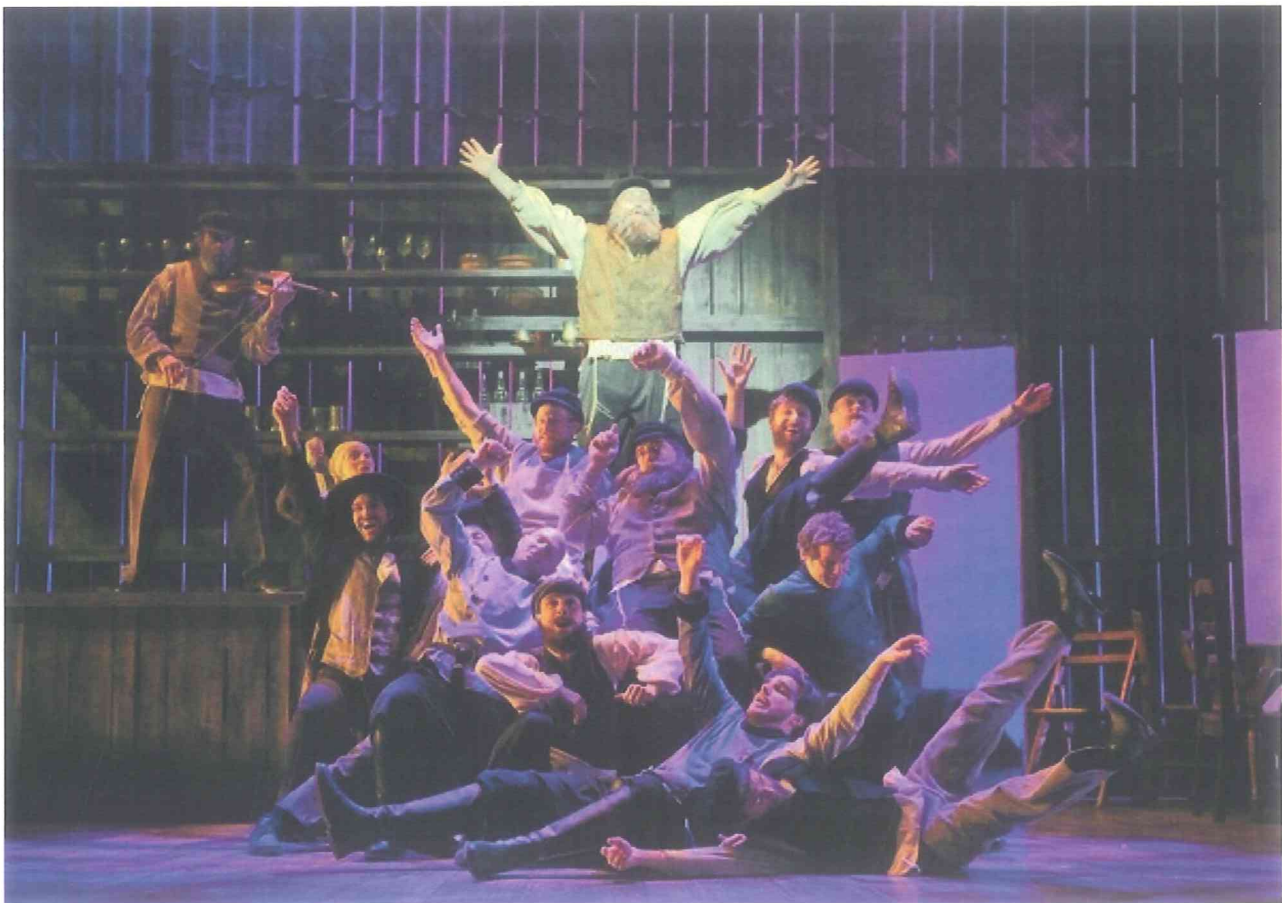
Tevye reigns in rich 'Fiddler on the Roof'

THEATER REVIEW: "Fiddler on the Roof" at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora ★★½

March 10, 2013|Chris Jones | Theater critic

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"Fiddler on the Roof" is among the greatest Broadway musicals for any number of reasons: a score without a single dud; rich, sturdy, funny characters who somehow reward with each revisit; a high-stakes story that not only blends the personal and religious but morphs before your eyes into a meditation on change. But it also has one very clever device that many shows have tried to copy but few have emulated: Tevye, the philosophic dairyman, gets to talk intimately to God. And God, as such great stars as Topol and Zero Mostel quickly figured out, can be conveniently located (from Tevye's perspective) right in the theater balcony. Tevye, really, gets to talk to us. What's not to love?

David Girolmo was supposed to play Lazar Wolf — a kind of supporting role he has been playing for years and could do in his sleep — in Jim Corti's expansive new production of "Fiddler" at the hospitable Paramount Theatre in Aurora. But a minor act of God intervened and Girolmo moved up to Tevye. (Peter Kevoian, who was originally cast in the part, is ill, although it is hoped he might return at some point during the run.) And Girolmo, grasping on to this unexpected opportunity as if it were a cart that may not roll his way again, was having a wonderful time Friday night in the Fox Valley. A savvy Tevye, a group to which Girolmo belongs, sees that teasing truths out of God lets you milk the audience. And, frankly, at a really good "Fiddler" — and this is a really good "Fiddler" with Broadway-sized production values and a big, vulnerable heart — we're not exactly reluctant to head to the milking shed.

Like other Paramount productions in this remarkable new suburban addition to Chicago's buffet of arts experiences, Corti's "Fiddler" [features](#)



a full pit orchestra, which allows you to hear the quirks of the sumptuous Jerry Bock score — the accordion, the lute, the celeste, the mandolin. It also features a carved design from Kevin Depinet that was enough to arrest a man who has seen scores of "Fiddlers."

Drawing from the historic Paramount's ambient advantages, Depinet centers the production behind a huge wooden frame, suggesting the solidity of the Anatevka community. But the actual village he constructs out of planks that at once evoke humility, community and the fragility of Popsicle sticks. In the famous scene where Tevye's daughter, Chava (Brooke Singer) pleads with her father to allow her to marry outside of the Jewish faith, a request that her father cannot grant, Corti and Depinet concoct a moment wherein the screaming girl (and she is truly distraught here) is almost crushed by the roofs of Anatevka that descend on her body as her father heads away. It's a very powerful moment that, as does the rest of this production, manages to walk just the right line between the pull of simple nostalgia and the show's clear message that he who does not change allows his enemies to gain a foothold. At the end of the night, Anatevka looks more like fodder for a bonfire as its community scatters in all directions.

Girolmo catches almost all of Tevye except, notably, his stillness and calm. And he has more yet to do in the rushed and awkwardly staged last scene, when rules and love really collide for this man. But given his assumption of the role at the eleventh hour, Girolmo achieves a great deal in a production stocked with performances so solid you could pull a cart on top of them and they'd survive: Iris Lieberman as Golda, Renee Matthews as Yente, Fredric Stone as the Rabbi. Skyler Adams' Motel, though, is especially notable for his mix of surety and raw panic, which is perfect for this character, qualities you can also see in Kelley Abell, who plays Tzeitel and in Jazmin Gorsline's yearning Hodel. Brandon Moorhead makes much of Fyedka, often a throwaway role, as does Jim DeSelm with Perchik.

This production is modestly choreographed (by Gordon Peirce Schmidt) with an eye on character and narrative more than the flashy set-pieces that sometimes dominate other productions of this piece.

There have been splashier bottle dances and zestier matchmaker, matchmakers, but the singing and acting are exceptional and the swirl of the movement tells the human story.

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When: Through March 24

Where: Paramount Theatre, Aurora

Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes

Tickets: \$34.90-\$46.90 at 630-896-6666 or paramountaurora.com