

'Fiddler on the Roof' a perfect match for Overture Hall

By Victoria Davis | Special to the Cap Times

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The national tour of the 2015 Broadway revival of "Fiddler on the Roof" plays Overture Hall in Madison from Nov. 16-21. JOAN MARCUS

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The sound of a train whistle and lightly played fiddle not only welcomed Madison audiences Tuesday night to the humble and tightly-knit world of Anatevka, it also ushered in the first Broadway Across America performance of the season at Overture Hall.

It was an evening full of excitement, with "Fiddler on the Roof" being the first time many audience members have stepped into a theater in almost two years. The anticipation in the crowd was tangible as the stage lights rose and a fiddler player, shrouded in a misty blue backdrop and dressed in royal purple, played alongside a warmly dressed narrator under an old wooden sign reading, "Anatevka." Then, the first and very familiar words of the night were spoken.

"A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof."

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Tevey (Yehezkel Lazarov, far right) tells his dream to Golde (Maite Uzal), attended by ghosts (Carolyn Keller, Michael Hegarty) in the national tour of "Fiddler on the Roof."

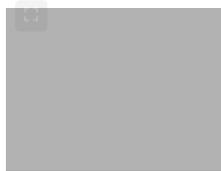
JOAN MARCUS

Soon this narrator, revealed to be the beloved Tevey and father of five (yes, five) daughters, was joined by a crowd of villagers, and the stage exploded to life with enthusiastic snaps, stomps, songs and even spitting as part of the score that tells of the hierarchy and roles of each member of a Jewish family.

"Fiddler on the Roof," the 10-time Tony Award-winning production by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, first premiered in 1964 and is based on the book by Joseph Stein. This musical, with original direction by Bartlett Sher and recreated by Sari Ketter and Shelley Butler, is the 2015 revival of the longest-running Broadway musical of all time. It follows a poor Jewish man named Tevey as he wrestles with his three eldest daughters' pursuit of non-traditional lives and non-traditional marriages in a town completely devoted to tradition.

"Fiddler on the Roof" will be performing at Overture Hall through Sunday, November 21.

While a play founded on the topic of arranged marriages might seem like an outdated tale of the past, "Fiddler on the Roof" proved last night that the strive for change in a constantly evolving world is never just history. After all, here in Anatevka, everyone is a "fiddler on the roof," searching for either love, wealth, respect, education or clarity of faith, hoping that it will bring them what they truly desire: freedom.



Olivia Gjürich plays Fruma-Sarah and Yehezkel Lazarov plays Tevey in the national tour of "Fiddler on the Roof."

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Yehezkel Lazarov plays the iconic role of Tevey in the national tour of "Fiddler on the Roof."

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Award-winning Israeli actor, director and choreographer Yehezkel Lazarov completely shines on stage in his third season playing a self-assured but sincere Tevey, and has excellent love-hate chemistry with Maite Uzal, who plays Tevey's willful wife Golde. Uzal dedicated her performance to her own mother.

The whole town is a comedic and moving wonder to behold, from the exhausting matchmaker Yente (Brooke Wetterhahn) and the boisterous butcher Lazar Wolf (Andrew Hendrick) to Tevey and Golde's endearing and inspiring daughters Tzeitel (Kelly Gabrielle Murphy), Hodel (Ruthy Froch) and Chava (Noa Luz Barenblat).

Barenblat actually took breaths away with her heart-wrenching performance in Act II of a daughter abandoned. There was not a single sound to be heard from the audience as her desperate cries for "Papa!" faded into black.





The bottle dance, featuring the cast of the national tour of "Fiddler on the Roof."

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The choreography, originally by acclaimed Israeli choreographer Hofesh Shechter and recreated by Christopher Evans, is like a visual jolt of adrenaline. The bottle dancing in the first act is completely thrilling. There's no tricks, just a group of men actually trying to balance bottles on their heads while sliding and twirling about the stage. And Tevye's dream sequence is an incredible circus of masked dancers, some on stilts, in an eerie but exciting setting of fog, and flashing lights.

Props (pun intended) also goes to set designer Michael Yeargan and lighting designer Donald Holder for bringing to life this small, Ukrainian corner of the world on Overture's stage with sun-kissed wedding canopies, dusty barns, candlelit sabbath dinners, and starry-moonlit nights. Anatevka, as put by Yente, "isn't exactly the garden of Eden," but it was certainly a heavenly experience to be immersed in.



The cast of the national touring production of "Fiddler on the Roof" leaves their home of Anatevka.

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Whether it's the surprising backflips or the convicting backtalk, "Fiddler on the Roof" — even over 50 years later — continues to wow and impress and makes us glad to be back at Overture, no longer "far from the home [we] love." And the play's messages of sacrifice and being true to oneself to achieve real freedom, even when up against sinister, fascist oppression, had audiences cheering "To life!" and clapping in rhythm during a well-deserved standing ovation that erupted into one more dance from the actors.

"Fiddler on the Roof" is the perfect way to say, "Welcome back" to our long-awaited theatre. We're ready for more.

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With 'Fiddler on the Roof', Overture Center prepares for crowds
"Fiddler on the Roof" opens Tuesday in Overture Hall in Madison, marking the first time back in the venue for many theater lovers since COVID-19 shutdowns.

'Fiddler on the Roof'

Through Sunday, Nov. 21

Overture Hall, Overture Center, 201 State St.

\$25-\$129

overture.org/events/fiddler-on-the-roof; (608) 258-4141

Running time is 2 hours and 45 minutes with one intermission. All who enter the building must wear a face mask and show proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 test with a photo ID.

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